the American Scholar

SUMMER 1978 PRICE $2.00

Will There Always Be an England?
WILLIAM HALEY

A Barbarian's Cogitations
ALEXANDER GERSCHENKRON

Black Heavies
JERVIS ANDERSON

Mind from Matter?
MAX DELBRÜCK

Hannah Arendt's Teaching
PETER STERN and JEAN YARBROUGH

Literature in the University
DAN JACOBSON

How to Read the New Contemporary Poem
PAUL BRESLIN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CHICAGO

What Is an Editor? Saxe Commins at Work

Dorothy Commins

"[This book] should be compulsory reading for every writer and editor in the country."—Irwin Shaw

Saxe Commins was the senior editor and, in the words of Bennett Cerf, "one of the great men of Random House," from 1933 until his death in 1958. In this work, Commins's widow, Dorothy, shows how her husband influenced the work of many important poets, playwrights, and novelists, especially O'Neill and Faulkner.

Cloth 256 pages $10.00

VICTORIAN NOVELISTS AND PUBLISHERS
J. A. Sutherland

A delightful account, for all who enjoy novels, of how the great English Victorian novelists fared at the hands of their publishers.

Paper vi, 251 pages $5.75

THE OYSTERS OF LOCMARIAQUER
Eleanor Clark

Winner of the 1964 National Book Award in Arts and Letters

"A book in which the novelist's gift of identification has merged with the essayist's delight in selection of detail, the traveller's roots and relationships."—John Wain, *The New Republic*

Paper x, 204 pages Illus. $3.95

FREUD: THE MIND OF THE MORALIST
Philip Rieff

Third Edition

With a new Epilog by the author

Now a classic, this book was hailed upon its original publication in 1959 as "a book of genuine brilliance on Freud's cultural importance . . . a permanently valuable contribution to the human sciences."—*Manchester Guardian*

Paper xxvi, 442 pages TBA June

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

Chicago 60637

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Long one of the elect, Philip Kurland adds to his laurels with a splendid survey of the constitutional problems that Watergate presented... Kurland joins to a searching and illuminating analysis a style that is vivid, witty, and pungent."—Raoul Berger

WATERGATE AND THE CONSTITUTION

Philip B. Kurland

"I find [this book] most fascinating. It is not concerned with a mere recital of the misdeeds of those who participated in that tragic episode. On the contrary, Philip Kurland presents with his usual eloquence the constitutional implications of the Watergate tragedy."
—Sam J. Ervin, Jr.

"...trenchantly written, full of learning in law and history, and bound to be provocative in its portrait of a constitutionally deranged Republic and its call for a return to ancient moorings."
—Paul A. Freund

"...learned, graceful, wise, and stimulating... A rich and exciting work whose wit and clarity are not the least among its many virtues."
—*Library Journal*

$12.50

THE IDEAL IN LAW

EUGENE V. ROSTOW

**"A stimulating contribution to an aspect of law that is all too frequently overlooked."
—Bernard Schwartz**

One of America's most notable legal philosophers assembles here some of his most significant essays on the role of ethics in law and law in ethics. To this eminent Yale professor, the goal of law must be the improvement of society and two of the essays are concerned with what Rostow regards as the fundamental issue in the nation's moral experience: the treatment of blacks in American law. Other highlights from the book are his eloquent papers on the citizen's obligation to law in a society of consent and on the relation of lawyer to client. Rostow's forthright realism and his insistence that law is unintelligible except as a quest for justice are particularly important for this era of positivism in legal philosophy.

$20.00

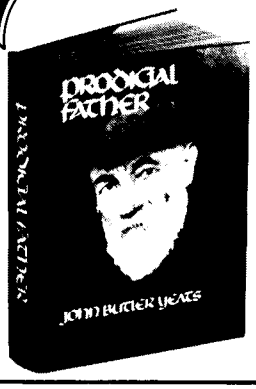
Main selection of The Lawyer's Literary Club

The University of Chicago PRESS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cornell University Press

"An illumination and a delight."
—HUGH KENNER



Prodigal Father

The Life of John Butler Yeats (1839-1922)

By WILLIAM M. MURPHY. This first full-length biography of John Butler Yeats brings to vivid life the entire Yeats family and the remarkable circle in which they moved. "A rare instance indeed of the right book being written by the right man.... An illumination and a delight from end to end." —HUGH KENNER. "A fascinating story of a man's life.... Well-structured and extraordinarily well-researched." —MICHAEL HOLROYD. "Professor Murphy has done an exceptionally fine job. His book will always be read." —RICHARD ELLMANN. *Color frontispiece, 140 black-and-white illustrations.* $27.50

Feminism and Suffrage

The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869

By ELLEN CAROL DuBOIS. Connecting American reform in the 1860s with the social history of women on one hand and the political history of Reconstruction on the other, the author shows how the suffrage movement grew away from the ideological and strategic control of the abolitionists and pursued an independent course. *A History Book Club selection.* $12.50

Woman's Fiction

A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870

By NINA BAYM. This book traces the birth, growth, and decline of a genre of popular fiction that dominated American literary taste for at least a generation. $15.00

Romantic Origins

By LESLIE BRISMAN. Bringing to bear on a number of key texts a powerful critical imagination, Leslie Brisman explores the dream of autogenesis in the poetry of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron, and George Darley. $15.00

The Emergence of German as a Literary Language, 1700-1775

Second Edition, with a new bibliographical essay

By ERIC A. BLACKALL. Professor Blackall has amended and expanded this seminal study (first published in 1959) and added an essay that takes account of scholarly editions and research published over the past two decades. $20.00

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS Ithaca, New York 14850

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the American Scholar

Published for
General Circulation
by
PHI BETA KAPPA

EDITORIAL BOARD

JERVIS ANDERSON
SAUL BELLOW
JEREMY BERNSTEIN
PAUL FREUND
PETER GAY
CLIFFORD GEERTZ
OWEN GINGERICH
DIANA TRILLING
LILLIAN HELLMAN
ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE
CARL KAYSEN
MARTIN KILSON
HILTON KRAMER
ROBERT NISBET
EDWARD SHILS

JOSEPH EPSTEIN, *Editor*
ROBERT LUMIANSKY, *Consulting Editor*
RENÉ DUBOS, *Contributing Editor*
JEAN E. STIPICEVIC, *Associate Editor*
LISA McAULIFFE, *Poetry Editor*
MARY ELINORE SMITH, *Editorial Assistant*
CARLEY STRAUGHAN, *Subscription Manager*

Advertising Representative: KERR & ASSOCIATES, 1211 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite 604 Washington, D.C. 20036. Telephone: 202-296-1478.

Published quarterly since 1932 by the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa, 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009. Second-class postage paid at Washington, D.C. and at additional mailing offices. Copyright © 1978 by the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa.

Send all change of address notices, undeliverable copies, subscription orders and other mail to *Editorial and Circulation Offices:* 1811 Q Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

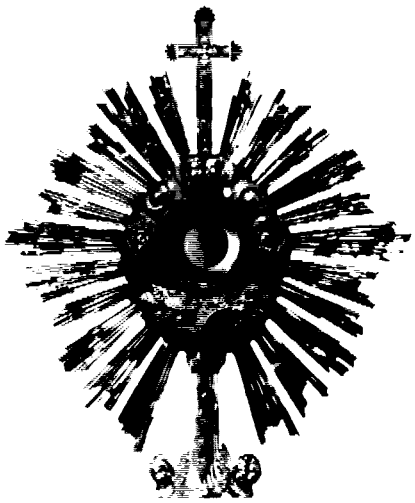
Subscription rates: $2.00 a copy, $8.00 one year, $14.50 two years, $20.00 three years, foreign and Canadian $.75 a year additional for postage.

Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by return postage. No responsibility is assumed for their loss or injury, or for the views expressed in articles published.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Canadian silver and other new books from

WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS



QUEBEC AND RELATED SILVER AT THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS

By Ross Allan C. Fox. For three decades The Detroit Institute of Arts has had a special interest in French Canadian art. The highlight of its collection is the silver, the finest outside of Canada.

The catalogue of the collection has just been published, tracing the history of silvercrafting in Quebec; it describes the prominence of silver in Quebec society for over 150 years.

Enhanced by the magnificent photographs of E. Irving Blomstrann of Wadsworth Athenaeum and full scholarly apparatus including biographies of twenty major silversmiths, index, appendices, the results of a pioneering elemental analysis, the volume will remain the definitive work for some time to come. *174 pages, 62 illus., 8-3/4 x 9-1/4, clothbound, $12.00*

RICHARD MAURICE BUCKE, MEDICAL MYSTIC
Letters of Dr. Bucke to Walt Whitman and His Friends

Selected and edited by Artem Lozynsky. Foreword by Gay Wilson Allen. Richard Maurice Bucke (1837-1902), a pioneer Canadian psychiatrist and mystic, the author of *Cosmic Consciousness* (1901), was Walt Whitman's most fervent disciple and most frequent correspondent, his first official biographer and one of his three literary executors. Bucke's letters to Whitman are published in this volume for the first time, giving an unusual glimpse into the life of Bucke. *203 pages, $12.95*

Co-published with Burns and MacEachern, Limited, Don Mills, Ontario:

POINT PELEE: CANADA'S DEEP SOUTH

By Darryl Stewart. With Contributions by Don Ross. Foreword by Pierre Burton. A full-color guidebook to Point Pelee, the southernmost tip of the Canadian mainland, a National Park of prime ecological importance and of immense interest to naturalists since 1877. *112 pages, illus., paper, $5.95*

SHIPS OF THE GREAT LAKES, A PICTORIAL HISTORY

Paintings by Karl Kuttruff. Introduction by Robert E. Lee. Including 31 full-color lithographs of the historic vessels which sailed the Great Lakes 1679 – 1976, in an exquisitely bound volume. *14 x 9, $25.00*

order directly from

wayne STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS Detroit, Michigan 48202

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CONTENTS

The Confy Guide
Jeremy Bernstein 296

Jokes and Their Relation to the Conscious
Aristides 302

Will There Always Be an England?
William Haley 313

On Reading Books: A Barbarian's Cogitations
Alexander Gerschenkron 329

Mind from Matter?
Max Delbrück 339

How to Read the New Contemporary Poem
Paul Breslin 357

Hannah Arendt
Peter Stern and *Jean Yarbrough* 371

Common and Uncommon Readers: Literature in the University
Dan Jacobson 383

Black Heavies
Jervis Anderson 387

POETRY

The Catholic Dance
Richard Frost 300

Ohio
John Updike 325

Rowing on Eaton-Brook Lake at Twilight
Gregory Djanikian 326

Handstand
Paul Petrie 328

Victorious Losses
Samuel Hazo 354

Bereaved
James Hearst 356

Old Age
Ralph Robin 381

Livery Stable
Richard Dankleff 382

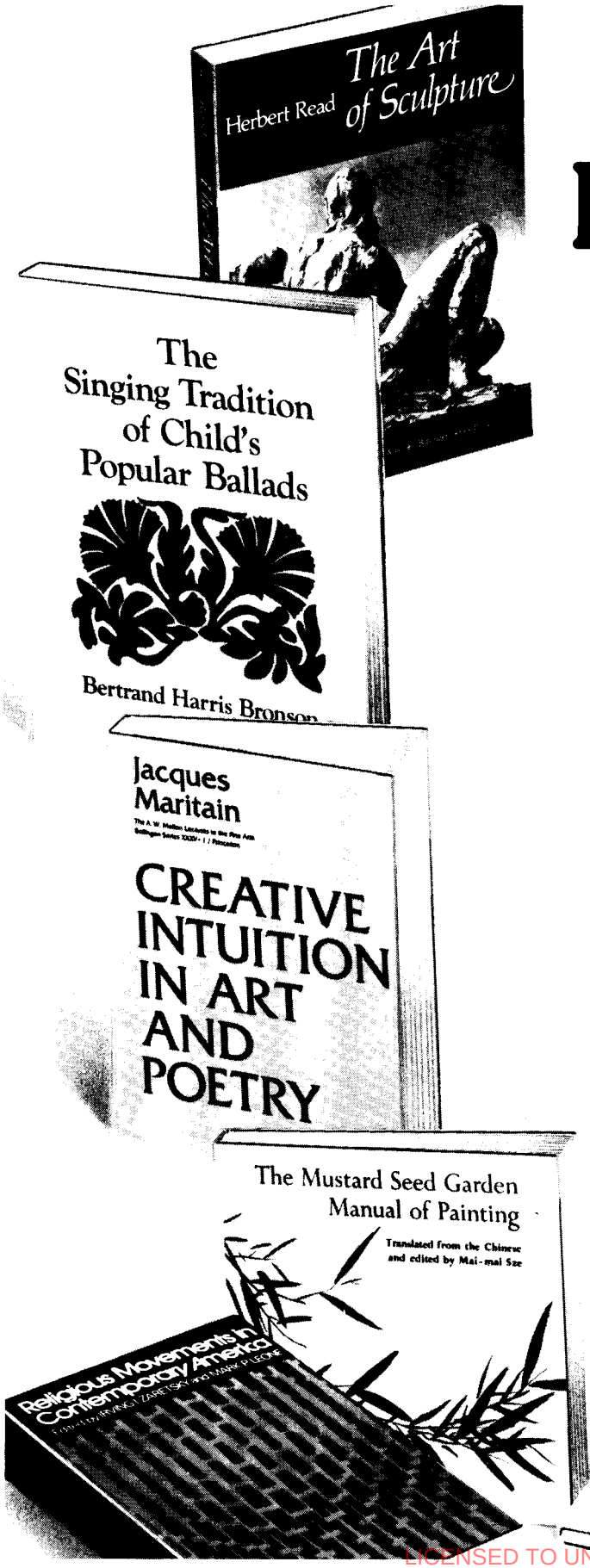
Kate's Poem
Sally Harris Sange 396

BOOKS

Fiction and Anti-Fiction
George P. Elliott 398

Reviews
Sidney Hook, Edward N. Luttwak, Hillel J. Kieval, Leon Edel, Paul Roazen, Eric Partridge, Henry McDonald 406

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Princeton's

THE ART OF SCULPTURE
Herbert Read
This visual history of sculpture leads to a thorough reappraisal of the art. The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts. Bollingen Series. 7½ x 10″. Illus. $8.95

THE SHRINES OF TUT-ANKH-AMON
Texts Translated with Introductions by Alexandre Piankoff; N. Rambova, Editor
The first translation of the hieroglyphic texts inscribed on the four gold-encrusted shrines that enclosed the sarcophagus of Tut-Ankh-Amon. Bollingen Series. Illus. $5.95

THE MUSTARD SEED GARDEN MANUAL OF PAINTING
A Facsimile of the 1887-1888 Shanghai Edition
Translated from the Chinese and Edited by Mai-mai-Sze
Over 400 examples of brush work comprise one of the world's greatest manuals of painting. Bollingen Series. 10⅛ x 10¼″. Illus. $8.95 (Cloth reissue, $20.00)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Paperbacks

THE SINGING TRADITION OF CHILD'S POPULAR BALLADS
Bertrand Harris Bronson, Editor
Here is a handy, one-volume edition of Bronson's acclaimed *Traditional Tunes of the Child Ballads* which *The Times Literary Supplement* called "the greatest single contribution to the scholarship of the ballad in this century." $12.50

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE OCCULT
C.G. Jung
Translated by R.F.C. Hull
Jung "dabbled in spooks" (as he wrote to Freud) and this volume brings together his writings on the occult, from 1902 until 1960. Bollingen Series. $2.95

MYSTERIUM CONIUNCTIONIS
C.G. Jung
Translated by R.F.C. Hull
Jung's last work of book length on the problems of philosophical alchemy and the synthesis of opposites. Bollingen Series. $6.50

THE TRAGIC SENSE OF LIFE IN MEN AND NATIONS
Miguel de Unamuno
Translated by Anthony Kerrigan
The acknowledged masterpiece of a great writer of modern Spain. Bollingen Series. $3.95

CREATIVE INTUITION IN ART AND POETRY
Jacques Maritain
"The best attempt yet made to write a poetics of modern art."—Joseph Frank, *New Republic*
The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts Series. Bollingen Series. 7½ x 10". Illus. $7.50

RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA
Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone, Editors
"Rich and readable, a guidebook to a colorful country fair of faiths."—Harvey Cox, *N.Y. Times Book Review*
$6.95

A LITERATURE OF THEIR OWN
British Women Novelists From Brontë to Lessing
Elaine Showalter
"Ought to be required reading for anyone who cares about women or the history of the novel."—Erica Jong
$4.50

BLAKE AND ANTIQUITY
Kathleen Raine
The noted British poet and critic seeks to establish Blake's indebtedness to Neo-Platonic sources within the canon of the Western esoteric tradition. The A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts. Bollingen Series. Illus. $5.95

At bookstores or direct from
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
Write for a checklist of over 400 Princeton Paperbacks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Out of My Mind

The Confy Guide

JEREMY BERNSTEIN

Recently I bought and had installed in my apartment a large bookcase. This might be a classic example of a non-event except for what followed. In order to fill the bookcase I was obliged to clean out several closet shelves, and in the course of this activity I came across an item I had forgotten that I had: the 1955 *Confidential Guide to Freshman Courses*. The "confy guide," as we used to call it, was, and probably still is, an annual publication put out by the *Harvard Crimson* in which courses and the teachers thereof were rated, often with disturbing candor. It was to the intellectual life of the Harvard freshman what the Consumers Union is to the purchaser of electrical appliances.

The 1955 guide, the thirtieth annual edition, sold for fifty cents. When it fluttered off my closet shelf, I conjectured—correctly, as it turned out—that the reason I still had it was that I must be in it somewhere. Indeed I was, on page 43 under the heading Natural Science 2—one of the general education courses designed to leave the non-science major singed but not scorched. After a description of the lectures that began, "Professor X gives them; they take place at nine o'clock in the morning on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday; and the Saturday lecture is *never* called off, come Princeton weekend, Yale weekend, Christmas vacation, or in all probability the Bomb itself . . ." (a list, I take it, compiled in decreasing order of importance), I found the following entry: "*Bernstein* handled the bulk of the section work last year. He did not exactly provide a 90-minute fount of inspiration every week [a 90-minute "fount" is a lot of fount], but this is probably because he was as bored as everyone else with the useless sections." (Bernstein was also spending about eighty hours a week working on Bernstein's Ph.D. thesis. *There* was a fount.) "For his part, he was always prepared [that's what *you* think] for the required lecturette [who *wrote* this?] if anyone cared to stay around for it after the quiz. He was also very willing to help students individually with difficult material [there were some *very* good-looking girls in that class] and he added a bit of whimsy to the course [a commodity that he is rapidly running out of] that contrasted delightfully with the administrative pompousness of ——— & Co."

In all fairness, it must be said that "——— & Co." hired Bernstein after he had been fired by "———," a professor in another course, for showing a bit too much whimsy at the wrong moments. "———" had some difficulty with the concepts he was dealing with in the course he was teaching—something that appealed mightily to Bernstein's sense of whimsy. If "——— & Co." had not (and with considerable misgivings) hired Bernstein at this crucial juncture, Bernstein might have become a writer, or God knows what, rather than a theoretical physicist, since otherwise Bernstein would not have had the wherewithal to have paid Bernstein's tuition. Bernstein is in debt to "——— & Co." in more ways than one.

After having taken this nostalgic ego trip, I continued to browse around in the guide. Under Government 1, I noticed "*Triska* and *Brzynski* [*sic*] grasped the material well and marked fairly." Is it possible that President Carter had access to the 1955 "confy guide"? Under French Ca 1 spotted the following: "*Shattuck*, one of the three running the course, was the only man who inspired stu-

JEREMY BERNSTEIN is a professor of physics at Stevens Institute of Technology and a staff writer for *The New Yorker*. His latest book is *Experiencing Science*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REMEMBRANCES OF CONCORD AND THE THOREAUS

Letters of Horace Hosmer to Dr. S. A. Jones

Edited by George Hendrick. "The thrilling annals of the scholar-detective must now include the story of these 41 letters traced to an Illinois attic by an English professor. Written by a Concord working man . . . who knew the Thoreau household and the townfolk intimately, the letters were directed in the 1890s to a physician searching for the true details of Thoreau's life. Providing many fresh facts and new insights, Hosmer writes with such force and humor and bite that his letters are to be treasured for their own quality as well as their contribution to Thoreau scholarship." —*Library Journal.* "This is the most personable glimpse of Thoreau since Edward Emerson's 1917 *Henry Thoreau as Remembered by a Young Friend.* Don't miss it." —*Thoreau Society Bulletin.* $8.95.

Henry David Thoreau

HENRY SALT

Humanitarian Reformer and Man of Letters

George Hendrick. A clear, concise treatment of the intellectual life and work of a figure who may be considered unique in his commitment to humanitarian goals. "All ardent Thoreauvians should be aware of Henry Salt's immense contributions to Thoreau's fame and scholarship in England at the turn of the century. Their best evaluation so far is to be found in this new biography." —*Thoreau Society Bulletin.* $10.00.

Henry Salt

Individuals please include cash with order. We pay postage and handling charges.

University of Illinois Press Urbana 61801

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dents to praise; otherwise a rather dull, disorganized course was not appreciated by any except as a way to pass the language requirement." Well, that is the general idea.

As I wandered through the guide, with its generous sprinkling of adjectival terms such as "trivial," "bored," "worthless," "a swell guy," "dull and unprepared," "inspired," and so on, a thought suddenly hit me: Is *this* what is meant by "teacher evaluation"—the new parameter that places like Harvard seem to have discovered—against which promotions and tenure are to be, in some part, decided? If not, what *is* teacher evaluation, and does it make any sense? To get a grip on this slippery matter I decided to try the "confy guide" out on the teachers who really meant something to me at Harvard.

The first discovery I made was that most of them were not in the guide at all. The great community of scholars that makes Harvard what it is, that makes any superb university what it is, for purposes of the guide simply does not exist. As it states, "The *Guide* is based on the responses of the average student with the average outlook." The meshes of this net are so large that most of the significant fish have swum away. If the "confy guide" were really taken seriously, and used as a determining criterion for promotions and tenure, the Harvard faculty would be aglow with "swell guys . . . perfect in every respect," "fine graders" who "really know their stuff." It sounds like a swell place to visit, but would anyone want to live there?

Of the three teachers who had a decisive influence on my own life and career—the physicist Julian Schwinger, the physicist-philosopher Philipp Frank, and the mathematician George Mackey—only Mackey is to be found in the guide. Under Mathematics 1, the basic introduction to calculus, the guide notes: "*Mackey* was lauded for competence, but very much criticized for his delivery. He talked too fast and wrote illegibly, according to one student." As I recall, I first encountered Mackey in the fall of 1948. I imagine that he must have been an assistant professor without tenure, although at the time none of this meant much to me. I doubt that I knew what tenure was. Mackey was then a young bachelor. He lived in a small suite of rooms in one of the Harvard undergraduate houses, and he was always hospitable to anyone who wanted to come by to discuss mathematics. Mackey's immersion in mathematics was total. He was generally working on several problems in parallel, and on one occasion he informed us that he recently had a dream in which he had become a partial derivative. For days this was the subject of active speculation among the small group of us whom Mackey tutored informally. Why a *partial* derivative? Why a derivative at all? Why not an integral, or a cosine, or perhaps a logarithm? We never came up with an answer that satisfied us.

By 1955, and indeed earlier, "Mackey's notes" had become—at least for those of us who were interested in mathematics and mathematical physics—legendary. By now some of them have been turned into books and research monographs. They were, in the first instance, notes that Mackey had prepared for his lectures. In those notes he had created for himself, and for us, various branches of mathematics and mathematical physics in coherent and novel ways. There were no real textbooks for these Mackey courses, although he would suggest books that we might look at—such as Hermann Weyl's classic *The Theory of Groups and Quantum Mechanics*, which Mackey told us he had been reading on and off for ten years.

Since Xerox copies were then unknown, Mackey would let us study, if necessary, his handwritten notes. These were reasonably legible once one got the hang of them. As the "confy guide" suggests, the lectures themselves had a vaguely eccentric quality that, as far as I was concerned, added to their interest. On one notable occasion, for example, Mackey got hopelessly stuck on the proof of a lemma. After a certain amount of groping around at the blackboard, which only increased the general confusion, he consulted his notes and then read aloud the relevant entry. It was "The proof of this lemma is trivial," which indeed turned out to be so when, at the next lecture, Mackey explained it. On several occasions he would assign as problems the proofs of theorems in which he had overlooked the statement of some essential hypothesis. When a student commented on this, Mackey remarked that in mathematics one should learn not to trust one's own grandmother.

All this made an ineluctable impression on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me. It was not so much *what* Mackey taught—the mathematical content of the courses—since in 1953 I switched fields from pure mathematics to mathematical physics. Rather, he made me realize for the first time that mathematics was something that had been, and could be, created by *people*. Until I encountered Mackey I had had the impression that mathematics was somehow simply there, and had been codified from time to time by writers of textbooks. I think I felt that Euclid was some sort of textbook publisher, like McGraw-Hill. But here was a person—Mackey—who was manufacturing the stuff for us in front of our eyes. Needless to say, in a course like Mathematics 1 this talent was hardly necessary and barely visible; all that the writers of the "confy guide" saw, and passed on, were a few surface trivia.

While I am on the subject of the creation—or, better, the "invention"—of mathematics, I recall that soon after I became convinced that this was what Mackey was doing I decided to drop by his office and ask him how one went about it. I think that was the first time I ever asked a practicing scientist about this, something that in the last few decades I seem to have been doing rather often as a vocation. Of course Mackey did not know how one did it, but he suggested that I read a book by the great French mathematician Jacques Hadamard: *An Essay on the Psychology of Invention in the Mathematical Field*, in which Hadamard presents accounts by various mathematician-scientists, including Einstein, of how they go about thinking. From the book, and from my own more recent endeavors, I came to the conclusion that they did not know how they did it either. In fact, as far as I am concerned, the whole matter was beautifully summarized in a dialogue Freeman Dyson told me about several years ago that took place between his two young children. It went something like this:

She: I know how a boat rows.

He: How?

She: You take the rowers and pull them in the water, and this pushes the water and rows the boat.

He: I do *not* know how a boat rows, but I can row it anyway.

(Parenthetically, the one mathematical genius I have encountered who was quite happy to explain his "trick" was William Klein, the computing prodigy who recently retired from CERN, the international nuclear laboratory in Geneva. Mr. Klein, for example, can produce the fifteenth, or indeed any, root of a many-digit number in a few seconds, in his head. When I asked him what the trick was, he said it was quite simple: he had memorized the table of logarithms from 1 to 150 to fourteen decimal places!)

From all this the reader will conclude, and correctly, that in matters of promotion and tenure at great universities, at any university, I believe that the "confy guide" or its equivalents should be taken, if at all, *cum grano salis*. A university that failed to promote a George Mackey or his equivalent because he "talked too fast and wrote illegibly, according to one student," would be better off, in my view, selling its landholdings to the nearest real estate developers and going out of the business of higher education and scholarship. This is not to say that I favor poor teaching. We can all learn to teach better, and in this effort student evaluations can be, if used properly, very helpful. In the physics department at Stevens, where I teach, we have recently instituted these evaluations, and when I read my own—the only one that is of any relevance for me to read—I am constantly surprised. The things that trouble students about my lectures, which naturally I have always assumed to be models of lucidity, really astound me. This is healthy, and I always discuss the evaluations with the students to try to sort out the particular from the universal and vice versa. But as far as I am concerned, this is the limit of their relevance. I am not putting on a television series or a Broadway show. I am *teaching physics*, and the value I bring to the students, I should have thought, is the result of having tried to produce the stuff for the last twenty-five years. I *know* what my students need to learn if they want to become physicists, and they do *not* know.

At the hypothetical "J. Bernstein University," the freshman class would be assembled before the fall semester began. Instead of the sort of convocation ceremony at which students witness the presentation of the Neville Glang Memorial Award for "outstanding self-effacement" and the like, and the usual hortatory remarks by the president, various professors would describe their own education,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the teachers who influenced them, and how this influence affected their careers. None of us was manufactured in a vacuum. Each of us has had a George Mackey, or two, in our provenance, and if we succeed in our work as teachers this will perhaps reflect itself in what we bring to our students.

As an undergraduate, I had the good fortune of being rather naïve. I was not quite like the young Thomas Wolfe, who was so intoxicated by the prospects that Harvard seemed to be opening up that he decided to read all the books in Widener Library in alphabetical order; but I know what he felt. He must have seen himself as the guest at a gigantic, and rather unexpected, intellectual banquet.

Along the way there will be good teachers and bad teachers—swell guys and not so swell guys—but at the J. Bernstein University they will all have one thing in common: a dedication to the human mind and what it can create. Isn't this the real criterion for teacher evaluation?

The Catholic Dance

RICHARD FROST

Father Crowley, angered that we boys
stand against a wall, the girls waiting
across the room, everyone expected to dance,
grabs me by one arm and says he is taking me
over there and getting the thing started.
He hauls me to a pink beauty, and I bow
and learn her name. I say, "Wanda, this
is Father Crowley. He is too embarrassed
to ask you to dance with him, so I have agreed
to help. I know you will find him most pleasant."
And I bow again, all the while Crowley,
old bull-neck, red as my necktie, shakes and stutters
and actually starts to dance.
I leave the hall,
walk past the empty buses, the mascot goat
locked in his pen, the brick gate with its lanterns,
the traffic flashing in its trough. Those boys
who locked my arms behind me, they spin and fall,
my words around their throats. And I am back
in school each day. One never learns enough.

RICHARD FROST teaches in the department of English at the State University of New York, Oneonta. He is the author of two books of poems, *The Circus Villains* and *Getting Drunk with the Birds*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books from Ohio State

Unorthodox Judaism

By Norman B. Mirsky. How the Jew remains a Jew under pressure of the all but irresistible forces that emanate from the larger society around him is the subject of Rabbi Mirsky's study. He examines the several traditions and many crosscurrents within Judaism, and discusses the paradoxes and dilemmas they pose to the American Jew in search of a secure identity. He finds organized Judaism largely unresponsive to the wants and needs of large numbers of its congregants involved in that search, and sees this as the cause of the present drifting away from the traditional synagogue that has led, in a few notable instances, to the establishment of "new culture" congregations that lie outside the Jewish community, and to such phenomena as the "Jesus Jews" and temples led by atheistic rabbis. $12.00

Froude's Life of Carlyle

By James Anthony Froude. Edited and abridged by John Clubbe. A judicious abridgment and edition of one of the two or three truly great biographies in the English language that restores to the literature a masterpiece hidden and neglected. By freeing Froude's text from the excesses in documentation belonging to the Victorian tradition of life and letters, Professor Clubbe makes it accessible to the modern reader, who will find, to his considerable profit and perhaps to his surprise, that few books have more to teach than Froude's *Life of Thomas Carlyle.* $30.00

Studies in Perception

Interrelations in the History of Philosophy and Science

Edited by Peter K. Machamer and Robert G. Turnbull. The problems encountered in attempting to identify what are the immediate objects of perception, and to establish the relations between sensation and perception, and between perception and cognition, appear and reappear with striking regularity in different historical periods; and it has only been recently that writers on the subject have come to insist that the problems peculiar to their study be divided into groups according to those modes of intellectual inquiry that are thought appropriate to their solution. Contemporary studies in and of perception have suffered from this parceling by academic discipline, and it is to the reintegration of both the subject and its treatment that the essays in this volume are addressed. $30.00

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
2070 Neil Avenue, Columbus 43210

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Life and Letters

Jokes and Their Relation to the Conscious

ARISTIDES

My title, of course, derives from Freud's famous work, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.* In that work Freud put forth the notion that there are ultimately no jokes—and, as usual, he wasn't kidding. At bottom, he found, most jokes had as their purpose either hostility or exposure. But as Freud found it necessary, as Peter Gay has put it, "to be rational about irrationality," so in his book on jokes he turns out to be good-humored in his finally humorless task. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious,* in addition to being another piece of brilliant Freudian analysis, is also a compendium of quite good jokes, and from his selection of examples, it is apparent that Freud loved a joke. This should come as no great surprise. "The attitude of psychology," W. H. Auden once remarked, "should always be, 'Have you heard this one?' "

As a medical student Freud wrote a histological paper of some significance in which, to make sure of the firmness of his conclusions, he went to the trouble of dissecting four hundred eels. For his book on jokes, one suspects that he must have listened to more than four times that many jokes, though in the book itself he dissects, at a rough guess, only a hundred or so of them. Being Sigmund Freud, he is never obtuse—and if not everywhere persuasive, he is never less than intriguing. Only with one joke in the book does he, to my mind at least, go askew. This is the joke about Itzig in the army, which, as Freud recounts it, goes as follows:

> Itzig had been declared fit for service in the artillery. He was clearly an intelligent lad, but intractable and without any interest in the service. One of his superior officers, who was friendlily disposed to him, took him to one side and said to him: "Itzig, you're no use to us. I'll give you a piece of advice: buy yourself a cannon and make yourself independent!"

Freud believed that what this joke is about is that "the officer who gives Artilleryman Itzig this nonsensical advice is only making himself out stupid to show Itzig how stupidly he himself is behaving." I myself think the joke is really vaguely an anti-Semitic one about Jews performing best when in business for themselves. Another joke of the same type has to do with the Israeli private who is doing poorly in the army until his sergeant tells him he can win a weekend pass if he captures an Egyptian tank. Lo, three weeks in a row he brings in an Egyptian tank, and on each occasion wins his weekend pass. One of his fellow enlisted men, hotly curious, asks him how he does it. "Very simple," he says. "I go over to our motor pool and take out a tank. Then I drive out into the desert till I spot an Egyptian tank. At this point I hoist up a white flag. When the Egyptian tank driver comes within hearing range, I call out to him, 'Hey, friend, want to win a weekend pass?' "

Freud was chiefly interested in the underlying meaning of jokes—in, as his title announces, their relation to the unconscious—but I think that the relation of jokes to the *conscious* has an interest of its own. The above paragraph, for example, touches on a number of questions about jokes at the level of consciousness. Ethnic sensitivities abraded by jokes is but the most obvious. Would the Anti-Defamation League rather not have these two jokes told? ("Incidentally," Freud noted, "I do not know whether there are many other instances of a people making fun to such a degree of its own character [as do the Jews].") Then there is the question of jokes and taste. Ought one to be making

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Who has the last laugh now?

He's a fox and a rake and a ruler. He's Falstaff and Don Quixote and Tom Jones. In Byron, he's a lover; in Flaubert, a bungler. In our time, he's Leopold Bloom, Yossarian, and Randle Patrick McMurphy.

A subject of scorn and ridicule, the comic hero is often absurd, always defiant, but ultimately indestructible. A true hero for our time.

Now, for the first time, there's a book celebrating the comic hero in all his guises.

Read it. If you take your comedy seriously.

The Comic Hero

Robert M. Torrance

$15.00

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Israeli-Egyptian jokes at a time when life in the Middle East is dire? Can it be that the better jokes are no laughing matter?

The world is divided on the question of the value of jokes: between those who adore them and those who, if not outright offended, are left cold by them. (The world, Robert Benchley said, is divided into two kinds of people—those who divide the world into two kinds of people and those who don't.) I happen to be among those who adore jokes. In saying this, I do not mean to say that I am a fine fellow, of that caste of special and superior beings: the good-humored. I used to think that a sense of humor was an absolute requisite for friendship; and while it is true that most of the people I count as friends enjoy laughter, so, alas, do many people who are frivolous, or cynical, or even vicious. Idi Amin, I understand, enjoys a joke, too.

Having established that a taste for jokes is no sign of superiority, I am nonetheless not about to demonstrate my mental inferiority by setting about the thankless and absurd task of seriously defining a joke and then strenuously analyzing the nature of jokes. Jokes, like beauty, are too various to capture in any but a jerry-built definition. It is enough to say that there are short jokes and long jokes, sweet jokes and sour jokes, healthy and sick jokes, and jokes that spring from whimsy, anger, or sharp observation and sometimes from all of these in combination. But finally a joke is a joke, and the way to tell if it is any good or not is to notice, after you have heard it, whether you are smiling. If you are doing so out of more than politeness, it is a pleasant joke; if you are laughing, it is a good joke; if you are rocked with laughter, your eyes watering with laughter, it is, quite possibly, a blessed joke.

Max Beerbohm, whose work as an essayist and as a draughtsman has brought so much laughter, remarked that "only the emotion of love takes higher rank than that of laughter." He makes the interesting point that love has its origin in the physical and ends in the realm of the mental, while laughter has its origin in the mental and ends in the realm of the physical. Beerbohm claimed that he could make nothing of the lucubrations of William James or Henri Bergson on the subject of laughter. ("It distresses me," he wrote, "this failure to keep pace with the leaders of thought as they pass into oblivion.") He was content to accept laughter as a great gift. He felt—rather like Freud, though for different reasons—that "nine-tenths of the world's best laughter is laughter *at*, not *with*." He held that "laughter is a thing to be rated according to its own intensity."

Max Beerbohm also said that the man who has not laughed much in life is a failure, and that he himself would rather be a man to whom laughter has often been granted but who has died in a workhouse than another who has never laughed but may be buried in Westminster Abbey. I like that exceedingly, because, measured by this standard, my life has already been a grand success. Laughter comes easily to me. Sometimes it comes too easily. I have been seized by attacks of giddy laughter in lecture halls, worn out by costly laughter in the act of courtship. Once, as a younger man, I was actually asked to leave a restaurant because my too uproarious laughter nearly resulted in upsetting a table. I seem, moreover, to be able to laugh at almost anything, exceptions being practical jokes and the comically intended descriptions of female actresses by the theater and movie critic John Simon. Well-done slapstick—for example, a man walking into a wall or one taking a pie in the face—can send me writhing to the floor. George Meredith said, "We know the degree of refinement in men by the matter they will laugh at, and the ring of the laugh." *I* laugh at Henny Youngman. So much, then, for my refinement.

I should prefer to die laughing and, on more than one occasion, thought I might. The best laughs, what Mel Brooks calls the dangerous laughs (implying the possibility of stroke or heart attack at the end of them), have invariably been private. The comic situation, the splendid off-the-cuff witticism, the unexpected fling of whimsy, the surgical puncturing of pretension, the predicament so bleak that it allows for no other response than laughter—these, which cannot be jerked from their context, make for the keenest laughter. Seldom do I laugh at the written word, although a few writers can bring me to this happy state: certain physical descriptions by Saul Bellow, patches of straight-faced dialogue by Evelyn Waugh, bizarre touches by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

S. J. Perelman, a mere phrase by H. L. Mencken (such as his reference, in one of his autobiographical volumes, to homosex as among "the non-Euclidian varieties of fornication"). Yet a book of jokes, of the kind that the late Bennett Cerf used to turn out, leaves me tighter lipped than a Calvinist at a porno film.

Jokes—formal, traditional jokes—are, or in my view ought to be, social acts. The best joke-tellers are those who have the patience to wait for conversation to come around to the point where the jokes in their repertoire have application. Take, for instance, the joke about Yankel Dombrovich, the forty-five-year-old bachelor from the village of Frampol, who is terrified of women:

> A match has been arranged for Yankel with a widow from a nearby village whose name is Miriam Schneider. Yankel is, dependably, terrified. His mother tells him not to worry. Women, she instructs her son, love to talk about three things: they love to talk about food, they love to talk about family, and if neither of these works they love to talk about philosophy.
>
> Finally the day arrives upon which Yankel and Miriam are to be introduced. Miriam turns out to be 4′ 6″ and weigh well above two hundred pounds, and to be without apparent gifts for, or even inclination toward, conversation. Yankel thinks, Oh, this is horrible, what will I say to her? What was it Momma told me women like to talk about? Oh, yes, food.
>
> "Miriam," he announces in a quavering voice, "let me ask you, Miriam, do you like noodles?"
>
> "No," she replies in a bass voice drained of expressiveness, "I don't like noodles."
>
> "Miriam," Yankel returns, remembering his mother's instructions that women also like to talk about family, "Miriam, do you have a brother?"
>
> "No," she answers, "I don't got no brother."
>
> Worse and worse, Yankel thinks. What is left to talk about? Oh, yes, philosophy. Momma says women like to talk about philosophy. "Miriam," Yankel lamely tries again, "let me ask you a final question: If you had a brother, would he like noodles?"

A more patient man than I would wait to tell such a joke until a discussion of modern philosophy arose. "Speaking of Wittgenstein," he might say, "do you know the story of Yankel Dombrovich?" But I am not that more patient man. So much did I like that joke when first I heard it that I told it, without aid of suave transition, to everyone I knew. But as I cannot await a suave transition to tell jokes, neither do I require any to have jokes told to me. In fact, I consider it a fine morning on which my telephone rings and a voice on the other end says, "Did you hear that the McCormick Company went to court to protest against the common metaphor for death being 'the Grim Reaper'?" No, I hadn't heard. "Yes, the McCormick Company has asked that henceforth death be known as 'the International Harvester.' "

My mornings are not interrupted in this way often enough. Even though I have a small band of four or five friends who share my love for a joke, and we report to each other regularly, not all that many new jokes seem to come into existence. Jokes may now, in fact, be in bad odor. I sense that nowadays people think there is something old-fashioned, square, out-of-it about them. My own generation, the one now in its forties, may possibly be the last to be interested in jokes, although perhaps here I am taking up the line of every generation as it grows into middle age. *Après nous, le déluge*, one thinks, when the generations behind one think *Après le déluge, nous*. Yet there can be no gainsaying that certain kinds of jokes have disappeared because their subject has disappeared. The old standby jokes about the traveling salesman and the farmer's daughter are a notable example. Here the conditions that once made the jokes tenable no longer exist. Less of the population is now on the farm, more salesmen probably now fly than drive, those who do drive usually are roaring along on freeways, and the old trust that once might have allowed a farmer to be at home to a salesman in distress is now gone.

Other kinds of jokes have disappeared because a social situation has arisen that makes them no longer funny. Mother-in-law jokes, for instance, have all but vanished. Why is the subject of mothers-in-law no longer funny? Because, I should guess, the assumptions under which such jokes once seemed funny can no longer be maintained. Although marriage has long been a subject for cynical jokes—"Married men make the worst husbands" is among the mildest—still, the old assumption behind most mother-in-law jokes was that marriage was really quite all right

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

except during those periods when men had their mothers-in-law inflicted upon them. Now that the divorce rate is up, and the troubles of marriage go beyond having mothers-in-law on the premises, the joke is over.

In "The Place of Laughter in Tudor and Stuart England," the Neale Lecture in English History for 1976, Professor Keith Thomas, arguing for the importance of jokes to the historian, notes: "Jokes are a pointer to joking situations, areas of structural ambiguity in society itself; and their subject matter can be a revealing guide to past tensions and anxieties." By the same token, they can be a guide to current tensions and anxieties. Why, for example, are there currently no jokes about Negroes in America? The history of jokes about Negroes is a mini-history of the state of whites' thinking about Negroes over the past four or five decades. In my own lifetime the radio program *Amos 'n' Andy* wrung laughs out of every stereotyped attribute of the Negro, chief among which were dumbness, malapropisms, and irresponsibility. Then, when the civil rights movement of the early 1960s got under way, something called the "Mississippi joke" began to go the rounds.

> The U.S.S. *Mississippi*, a ship manned by white Mississippians, has but a single Negro aboard. One day the captain calls the first mate over to ask the whereabouts of the Negro.
>
> "About two days ago he died, sir, and we threw his body overboard."
>
> "Overboard?" asks the captain. "Are you sure he was dead?"
>
> "Well, we asked him if he was dead before we did it, sir. He said he wasn't—but you know how they lie."

A fast and interesting switch: the target of this joke is no longer Negro stereotypes but the brutality and stupidity of people who hold to these stereotypes. Yet nothing significant in the way of Negro jokes has come along since. A single Negro comedian of real power, Mr. Richard Pryor, has proved too dangerous to appear regularly on television, and his work has instead been more frequently shown in the movies, where it is much blunted. The subject of Negroes has become, in Francis Bacon's phrase, "privileged from jest." Why? As an amateur sociologist, I should say because there is today a great unease and anxiety about the subject of the black population in the United States, of which a large portion has risen in the accustomed way up into the middle class, but of which a large segment still seems hopelessly mired in lumpen status, and this is no joking matter.

Quite apart from explicitly political jokes of the kind Mort Sahl used to tell, most jokes have something of a political implication—political insofar as they appeal to conservative or radical temperaments. A joke can be judged conservative or radical if, in its implications, it tends to reinforce the arrangements of society as it stands, or if it protests against current arrangements. By this measure the late Lenny Bruce, so beloved of intellectuals in the 1960s, was assuredly a radical comedian, even though little of his material was explicitly political. A single conservative comedian is more difficult to point out, for the work of conservative comedy is done by discrete jokes. "When we laugh," Professor Thomas notes, "we betray our innermost assumptions." Virginia Woolf made the same point from a somewhat different angle when she said that one of the nice things about having settled morals—and, one might add, settled politics—is that at least one knows what to laugh at. Tell me whether you think a good joke can be made about the subject of free enterprise or of public welfare and I will tell you a good deal about what your politics are.

Are ethnic jokes essentially political? For the most part I suspect they are, and the majority of them tend to be of a conservative cast. Their origin is evidently in xenophobia. As early as the time of Tudor England, according to Professor Thomas, "there were jokes against foreigners, whose characters had already assumed familiar stereotypes: the French were lascivious, the Spaniards proud, the Italians revengeful, the Dutch mean and the Germans drunk." Not the least item of interest about ethnic jokes is that they often serve as an index to the social standing of a particular group, and in any country. Over British television, one can still hear Irish jokes such as this one:

> Paddy goes to his physician to complain that in his marriage his sexual powers appear to be diminishing. The physician puts Paddy on a seafood diet, instructs him to run ten miles a day, and asks

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SHAKESPEARE AND THE POPULAR TRADITION IN THE THEATER

Studies in the Social Dimension of Dramatic Form and Function
Robert Weimann
edited by Robert Schwartz

In this major work, at last available in translation, Germany's leading Shakespearean scholar examines the social and dramatic dimensions of the popular tradition in the Elizabethan theater, shedding new light on the origins and values of Shakespeare's plays.

from reviews of the 1967 German edition

"The most important work on Shakespeare to come out of Germany since Clemen's *Shakespeare's Bilder* of 1936."—*G. K. Hunter, Notes and Queries*

"A milestone in Shakespeare criticism."—*Michael Hamburger, Shakespeare Jahrbuch*

$16.95

MEDIEVAL MARRIAGE

Two Models from Twelfth-Century France
Georges Duby
translated by Elborg Forster

The eminent French historian Georges Duby traces the development of tensions between two models of marriage in the Middle Ages: that of the nobility, who regarded marriage (and divorce) as a means for controlling land, power, and wealth, and that of the Church, which saw marriage as sacred and indissoluble. Duby treats the institution of marriage in its social, legal, ecclesiastical, and religious contexts, and explores attitudes toward incest, bigamy, divorce, and the importance of genealogy for French families. *Medieval Marriage* opens new avenues of inquiry in the history of law, morals and ethics, the family, and the role of women in society. $10.00

THE CHURCH MILITANT AND IBERIAN EXPANSION, 1440-1770

C. R. Boxer

C. R. Boxer, who has spent a lifetime of research and reflection on European expansion overseas into the Americas and Asia, now synthesizes his thoughts on the role of the Catholic Church in the Spanish and Portuguese empires. His topics include the Church's attitude toward slavery, the development of missionary literature in foreign languages, the mission as a frontier institution, and the Inquisition and the Iberian missions. Boxer has added another dimension to the study of the growth of modern Europe by detailing the close relationship of the "Church Militant" to the politics and society of Spain and Portugal.

$9.50

NEPTUNE'S GIFT

A History of Common Salt
Robert P. Multhauf

Common salt—a seemingly ordinary substance—yet, it has been instrumental in ushering in the age of petroleum fuels and has become a universal requirement of the chemical industry. It is also a fundamental factor in environmental deterioration. This first modern comprehensive history of salt deals with its production, uses, and role in the development of science and technology, as well as its social and political importance. (Salt, for example, was a source of revenue to governments from ancient China to *ancien régime* France.) *Neptune's Gift* offers a rare look at the fascinating history of a most ubiquitous mineral. $22.50

A Century of Scholarly Publishing
1878 1978
Johns Hopkins

The Johns Hopkins University Press · Baltimore, Maryland 21218

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him to call in at the end of two weeks. After two weeks on this regimen, Paddy telephones to his physician.

"Well, Paddy," the physician asks, "has your sex life improved?"

"How would I know?" answers Paddy. "I'm a hundred and forty miles from home."

Sometimes ethnic jokes can be self-reflexive, and often these are among the most bitter. "A kike," said the Jewish banker and philanthropist Otto Kahn, "is what you call the Jewish gentleman who has just left the room." This is a superior joke coming from Jewish lips but not good at all if told by a non-Jew. Its target, certainly, is not the Jews, but their insecure place in the polite society of Otto Kahn's day. An ethnic joke told by a non-insider almost always has the curl of a sneer to it, at least in the view of the insider. "The slap in the face," said the French philosopher Alain, "is registered by the man who receives it, not the one who gives it."

One of the many ethnic jokes Freud tells in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* is about two Galician Jews, one of whom asks the other, "Did you take a bath last week?" To which the other responds, "No, is one missing?" Today in the United States this joke would most likely be transformed into a Polish joke. In recent years the Poles have indisputably taken the brunt of ethnic humor in America.

A Pole finds a pig in the middle of the road. He brings it to his gas station attendant, whom he asks what he ought to do with the pig. The attendant tells him to take it to the local zoo, where they have a farm exhibit. Two weeks later, the Pole pulls back into the gas station. The attendant, noting the pig sitting on the front seat, says to the Pole, "I thought I told you to take that pig to the zoo." "I did," answers the Pole, "and he enjoyed it immensely. Today I'm taking him to the ball game."

Thirty years ago that would not have been a Polish but a "little moron" joke of the kind I learned in grade school. (Examples: Why did the little moron tiptoe past the medicine chest? He didn't want to wake the sleeping pills. Why does it take three little morons to replace a light bulb? One to hold the bulb, the other two to turn the ladder. Et cetera.) Now these are Polish jokes—these and, as anyone who has heard his share knows, others that are much worse. Why the Poles? Why so much contumely suddenly aimed at an ethnic group whose history in this country has largely been one of upstandingness and earnest aspiration? What seems to be the case is that the Poles, unlike other once-besieged minority groups in America, have no bank of social sympathy to draw upon. People will tell Polish jokes that they would not dare tell about the Negroes, or the Jews, or the Irish, or the Italians or Catholics. (Jokes about Catholics, too, have largely disappeared. Anti-Catholicism, as Richard Hofstadter once remarked, used to function as the pornography of Protestantism; hence all those foul jokes about priests and nuns.) True, it is traditional to make jokes about the lower classes, as it is traditional for the lower classes to have their own jokes about the upper classes. But the Poles of the United States and of the Polish jokes are of the lower-middle and middle classes. Is it, then, middle-class aspirations that are being attacked in Polish jokes? Or is it instead, more simply, that no society can carry on without having a target for attack and that the Poles, by elimination, are at present it?

The best ethnic jokes, it seems to me are those that use an ethnic element not as a target but as a background: the scenery for the joke, yet at the same time somehow more than mere scenery.

In the village of Tsrampel, the merchant Rebbe Goldman comes home early one afternoon to discover his wife being made love to on the couch in his parlor by his clerk Nathanson. Dazed, reeling with shock, he goes to his rabbi to report what he has just witnessed.

"Well," the rabbi responds, "your course is clear. You must divorce your wife."

"Divorce my wife, Rabbi?" says Rebbe Goldman. "Out of the question. I adore my wife."

"Then," says the rabbi, "you must fire your clerk."

"Fire Nathanson, Rabbi? Be serious. My business is up 40 percent over last year. And I owe it all to Nathanson, whom I consider indispensable."

"Very well," says the rabbi. "Go. In the meantime I shall study the commentaries to find a solution. Return to my study a week hence."

A week later Rebbe Goldman is back in the rabbi's study, a beaming smile upon his face.

"Well," says the rabbi, "I see that you have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jan S. Prybyla on China

THE CHINESE ECONOMY
Problems and Policies

What has happened since the deaths of Mao and Chou En-lai and the disgrace of the "Gang of Four"? What is the standard of living for one-fourth of humanity? Where will the "Long March" end? Based on the latest information and statistics animated by observations made during the author's recent trip to China, this new survey suggests answers that may surprise. The reader comes away convinced that the Middle East is not the only threat to the world's balance of economic power.

xiv, 260 pages ISBN 0-87249-364-4 $14.95 cloth
ISBN 0-87249-367-9 $5.95 paper

Michael Weinstein on Apolitical Theory

THE TRAGIC SENSE OF POLITICAL LIFE

" . . . a fascinating departure from jargon-as-usual and a refreshing plunge into modern man's political-personal condition . . ."
—*Publishers Weekly*

x, 190 pages ISBN 0-87249-361-X $9.95

Morse Peckham on Romanticism

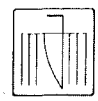
ROMANTICISM AND BEHAVIOR
Collected Essays II

"For over twenty years Peckham has been building a theory of Romanticism on his own terms, and the results are impressive and provocative."
—*Times Literary Supplement*

x, 390 pages ISBN 0-87249-328-8 $14.95

Unless you are blessed with a very good bookstore nearby, you will want to order these titles by mail. Just send payment for the advertised list price (or Visa/BankAmericard or Master Charge information) to:

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA PRESS
Columbia SC 29208



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decided to divorce your wife after all."

"On the contrary, Rabbi. My wife is a wonderful mother and has for twenty years been a good wife to me."

"Then you have decided to fire your clerk?"

"Never, Rabbi. Nathanson remains irreplaceable."

"So," says the rabbi, "then why are you smiling so contentedly?"

"Because, Rabbi, I sold the couch."

This joke is irreducibly Jewish. It would not work if it were set in a small Italian village with a shopkeeper going to his priest; it would not work set in Harlem. It is a sweet joke, lovely in many ways, although I think there are people who would take exception to it. Yet in it is to be found much of the pleasure that can be taken from ethnic jokes which are neither squalid nor vicious. The pleasure is in reacquainting ourselves with a piece of knowledge that, in the best schools, we are trained to disregard: the knowledge that there is something intractably distinct about every group, however we might wish to believe otherwise. And vive la distinction!

I do not think the world, giving way to ethnic sensitivities, would be better for the absence of ethnic jokes. Certainly such jokes are not now in the ascendant. If there is a reigning kind of humor, I should say it is psychoanalytic. Psychoanalysis—"the talking cure," as it used to be called—was once itself the subject of many jokes. (One woman to another: "My son has been to see a psychoanalyst, who tells him that he has an Oedipus complex." The other woman: "Oedipus, schmoedipus, just so long as he loves his mother!") Much of the humor of Woody Allen, surely the most admired comedian of our day, especially among the young, is psychoanalytic and not only in subject matter ("I'm never again going to a psychoanalytic conference," one Allen joke has it, "all those guys do in the evenings is sit around drinking and singing, 'I want a girl just like the girl that married dear old Dad'") but in style. The same can be said about the humor of Philip Roth, which is at its source, as are the conflicts in his novels, psychoanalytic. Both Allen and Roth are very funny men, yet much of their humor, like psychoanalysis itself, does not bear retelling. Although the comedy team of Id & Superego—if I might so bill psychoanalytic humor—has made possible many a hardy laugh, ultimately sex is the fringe beyond which it cannot get. The pleasures that psychoanalytic humor gives seem of a different order than those of conventional jokes.

What are the pleasures of conventional jokes? Granted, a habitual joke-teller can make himself a terrible bore, and certain vigorously filthy jokes can be, as Freud rightly said, "acts of sexual aggression." The tension brought about by the prospect of bad taste emerging in a joke-telling situation is always present: "Did you hear the one about the two lesbians, the Turk, and the cocker spaniel?" The pleasures, however, do outweigh the risks. "A new joke," Freud wrote, "acts almost like an event of universal interest; it is passed from one person to another like the news of the latest victory." Freud also wrote: "Joking activity should not, after all, be described as pointless or aimless, since it has the unmistakable aim of evoking pleasure in its hearers. . . . [It is] an activity which aims at deriving pleasure from mental processes, whether intellectual or otherwise." Telling a joke is an authentic instance of giving being an even greater delight than receiving. How else explain that retelling the same joke to a fresh audience never becomes tiresome, although it generally is tiresome to hear the same joke retold?

When someone tells a good joke, something extraordinary can happen. Most people, I have discovered, rarely have a repertoire of more than two or three jokes. But one joke can ignite the memory of others perhaps long forgotten, and soon the cornucopia pours forth. Topical jokes—about politics, celebrities, events—fade away, meeting their just fate alongside the songs of Nineveh in oblivion. But the permanent jokes, those of universal point and interest, hang on, over the years and over the generations. Occasionally a joke will be improved by the listener's response to it. I recall once telling an economist of the Chicago School the old joke about the airplane in difficulty, whose captain, in order to land the plane safely, had to ask that passenger who was of least value to society to bail out without a parachute—at which point a disc jockey and a used-car salesman got up in the middle of the aisle and started fighting. "I would like that joke much better," said the

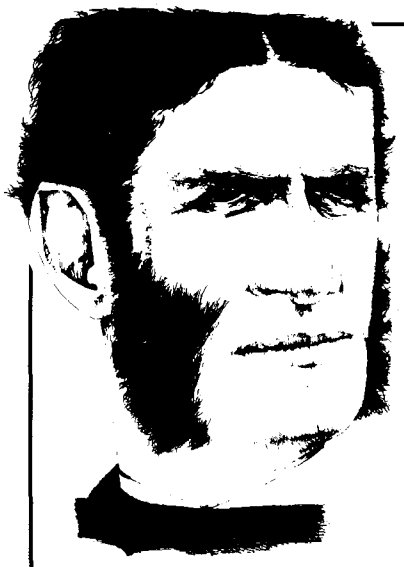
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

economist, "if two sociologists got up in the middle of the aisle and started fighting."

But the great point about jokes is that they all have a point. Perhaps they are out of favor just now because the kind of pointed clarity they provide is not much valued; or, at any rate, so one assumes from its absence from so much contemporary literature, film, painting, and criticism. If an analogy is wanted, jokes may be likened to short stories of the traditional kind—not merely in their brevity but in the range of their possible effects. Jokes can be ironical, philosophical, bittersweet, satirical—anything, really, so long as they are also funny. To the connoisseur a well-told joke is a poem of sorts, having its own special rhythm. In my head, punch lines from jokes rattle around quite comfortably alongside lines of poetry, taking on a poetic status of their own. I close with a poem made up of punch lines—a joke addict's wasteland:

Oy, was I thoisty!
The Kuala tea of Mercey is never strained.
You don't like my brother—eat the noodles.
An hour later you're hungry for power.
After lunch the captain wants to go water skiing.
How much do you tip the whipper?
Comfortable, I don't know; I make a nice living.
Hit the ball and drag Irving.
I'm crying because we lost India.
Patience, jackass, patience.
Is not hell for Khrushchev—is hell for Marilyn Monroe.
And you'll keep singing it till you get it right.
What do they know about fornication in Findley, Ohio?
So what's this vulgar crap?
You're velcome.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold

Edited by R. H. Super

"...a centrepiece of modern Victorian scholarship...."
—*Times* (London) *Literary Supplement*

"...one of the very finest scholarly achievements of our century."
—Frederick Shroyer
Herald Examiner (Los Angeles)

The University of Michigan Press

P.O. Box 1104
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106

Complete in eleven volumes

On the Classical Tradition	$ 6.50
Democratic Education	18.50
Lectures and Essays in Criticism	12.50
Schools and Universities on the Continent	9.00
Culture and Anarchy	9.50
Dissent and Dogma	11.75
God and the Bible	15.00
Essays Religious and Mixed	15.00
English Literature and Irish Politics	15.00
Philistinism in England and America	15.00
The Last Word	18.50

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Will There Always Be an England?

WILLIAM HALEY

"YOU ARE FINE CONCEITED COMPANIONS, you English of both sides, that think the matters of your own bedlam island are as interesting to all the world as to yourselves."

In this manner does Sir Walter Scott, in *Anne of Geierstein* (1829), imagine the fifteenth-century Duke of Burgundy ribbing the Earl of Oxford. It may be said that Scott was merely transferring, as authors do, the feelings of his own time to a character of three hundred and fifty years earlier. He was writing in the tempestuous years leading up to the Reform Bill. Yet the criticism is still so apt a century and a half after Scott wrote it that one must nevertheless accept the failing as chronic. All the more reason, therefore, to make it clear that the question this essay seeks to answer has been put to me recently by more than one American.

It is a question that prompts many reflections. The first is the swift mutability of modern history. More empires and nations have undergone extreme vicissitudes in this century than in any other. None has been more shaken, riven, and stripped than Britain. Russia and Austria-Hungary suffered revolutions, but even their upheavals were on a smaller scale. When I was born, the British Empire was outwardly at its apogee. The Pax Britannica seemed globally intact. The psychological scars of the Boer War were not yet evident. The British navy was still on a two-power basis—that is, larger than any two other navies combined. A few statesmen were becoming aware of a turning point in British dominance in world trade. The Victorian industrial revolution had petered out. The managerial revolution was a long way from beginning, and there are those today who would argue that it has still not yet begun. The growing power of Germany was a dim threat, both in arms and commerce. But Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee was only four years gone. The "Recessional" that Kipling wrote for it was still being recited. The seeming magniloquence of "Dominion over palm and pine" had not yet ceased to thrill the nation, but the dire forecast and warning in every verse of it were ignored.

A generation later, Winston Churchill was to be almost as blind to

SIR WILLIAM HALEY was director-general of the British Broadcasting Corporation from 1944 to 1952, and editor of *The Times* (London) from 1952 to 1966.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reality. He said he would not preside over the dismantling of the British Empire. It was dismantled in his lifetime nonetheless, at a faster pace than statesmen knew was wise or administrators thought possible. The Commonwealth of the old Dominions was enlarged to what now approximates a mini-United Nations. The Queen's rule extends over only some of them. The new Commonwealth holds together, not by loyalty or tradition, but purely by self-interest. The United Kingdom is no longer the mother country to any of its members. The sovereignty of the British Parliament will inevitably be restricted as it painfully but inexorably accepts the procrustean bed of the European Economic Community, of which it is now a member; even the way in which poultry is sold in England is to be controlled by Brussels. The future of the United Kingdom is itself being questioned. There are fears that the devolution of powers to Scotland and Wales may eventually lead to separatism, at best to federalism. What will happen to England then?

In answering the question of how all this has come about, there will be much to criticize, many faults to confess. But masochistic as the English are, and much as self-criticism and self-condemnation is their habit, the spirit in which these global changes have been made—the understanding, the charity, and the magnanimity that have been shown to the new nations in the process—should not be passed over silently. No other nation in history has returned independence, in some cases created it for the first time, to so many millions of people with so much goodwill and so little fuss. Mistakes were made, but the gravest of these, the partition of India, was not Britain's wish. Clement Attlee was right to press on in giving India and Pakistan separate independence once Muhammad Ali Jinnah proved intractable. If Britain had procrastinated, the whole future relations of Britain with India would have been soured. Even more people would have been killed.

Another mistake—outside the Indian subcontinent—was a relic of the Raj complex. Well-meaning administrators in London drew small circles on the map of the world, and made what they thought were tidy groupings of lesser territories. The Central African Federation and the West Indies Federation both disintegrated. The Malaysian Federation is artificial. But looking at the map today, one can say that, uncertain and politically unsettled as much of the world is, the disappearance of the areas traditionally colored red in Victorian atlases has on balance overwhelmingly added to the sum of the world's freedom and to the number of its democracies. As for the Pax Britannica, it was clear from the mid-1920s that this was no longer within Britain's grasp.

Physician, heal thyself. If Britain has been able to do so much that is right on a world scale, how is it that she has slid into such seeming disarray at home? What has gone wrong? How can it be remedied? Can

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it be remedied at all? The first thing to be said is that pictures of a halcyon past are delusive. Things were never so good as they have seemed in retrospect. Even with the euphoria that infected the nation in the closing years of the Victorian Age, not everyone was a Doctor Pangloss. William Hale White, writing under his pseudonym of Mark Rutherford, commented in his *Journal*, published in 1900:

> In these latter days of anarchy and tumult, when there is no gospel of faith or morals, when democracy seems bent on falsifying every prediction of earlier democratic enthusiasts by developing worse dangers to liberty than any which our forefathers had to encounter, and when the misery of the cities is so great, it appears absurd, not to say wrong, that we should sit still and read books. I am ashamed when I go into my own little room and open Milton or Shakespeare after looking at a newspaper or walking through the streets of London.

His apology for doing nothing was remarkably defeatist for one of England's finest novelists of dissent. It was simply that there was nothing he could do. "My brethren, I plainly perceive the world is all wrong, but I do not see how it is to be set right." Yet however ill the nation was, fourteen years later it had the will and the vigor to begin, and with its Allies to win, the most sacrificial of all its wars. The years from 1918 to 1939 were a hard time of political disappointment and economic depression. Yet when the even greater challenge came from Hitler, Britain buckled down again, to emerge once more victorious after having been the only one of the Allies to have fought both world wars from the first day of each to the last.

Although, as I believe, the seeds of many of England's present troubles were sown before then, it was in the aftermath of the final victory that they came to a harvest we have not even yet fully gathered. Bertrand de Jouvenel put it with brutal clarity in an article he wrote in the *Journal de Genève* early in the new peace: "The tragedy of the English people is that having expended wealth and effort to win two world wars they have come to the conclusion that the rest of the world owes them a living at the precise moment when the rest of the world has come to the conclusion that it does not." Britain's hopes of reciprocal canceling of debts among the Allies were not realized. American help was inadvertently curtailed. While the social reformation carried out by Mr. Attlee—the greatest of Britain's postwar prime ministers—was a triumph of revolution without rebellion, it has proved false to its promise and damaging in its effects. The Beveridge Plan, which had been a beacon for the fighting men and women, did not work as its creator had envisaged. The National Health Service removed from the middle and working classes the fear of the crippling costs of illness, but it became increasingly bureaucratized, is today unmanageable along its original

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lines, and is in effect bankrupt. Nationalization of coal, power, air and rail transport, and other key industries—"the commanding heights of the economy" have always been the prey of the extreme socialists—led to ministerial interference, to political overriding of managerial judgment, to daunting financial losses, and to a general demoralization of industrial leadership. The greatest disappointment of all came when the vision of a true partnership between workers and managements, once the state had taken over, proved a mirage with no ability to become reality. It is in "the commanding heights of the economy" that the workers now disrupt the nation when their will is not complied with. The miners forced Edward Heath out of office in 1974. Union influence forced Harold Wilson, who succeeded him, to abandon plans to introduce a wages policy. James Callaghan, the present prime minister, has cleverly handled both sides of industry, and has achieved far more wage restraint than seemed possible at the beginning of his term of office. But the unions are growing restive. A major question for voters at the next general election, which must come within twelve months, is whether the Conservatives, if they win, will have any chance of getting cooperation with the unions.

The trade unions are now the most powerful organized force in the land. Ironically, their lack of power within themselves is one of the nation's scourges. The Trades Union Congress, with which the majority of the nation's organized workers are affiliated, has no mandatory powers over any of the unions that constitute it. The leaders of the individual unions cannot always enforce obedience on their own members. Wildcat and other unofficial strikes are regular occurrences. Shop stewards have proved they can be more powerful than union leaders. The centralization of key work within such a small island as the United Kingdom enables a handful of men to bring to a halt a whole industry or public utility employing thousands. And so great has been the solidarity of the workers hitherto, aided by the humanely conceived provisions of the welfare state, that the men who were put out of work by the action of their fellows felt no hostility toward the wreckers. Lately the rank-and-file workers have begun to reassert themselves. Belligerent shop stewards are being turned down.

Not all the faults are on the unions' side. The effects of history and geography cannot be ignored. Nor can human nature. In the early days of the impending liberation of the empire, politicians and civil servants saw equal partnership in the government and administration of the newly enfranchised territories as the sensible solution. At home, the workers, who for over a century had been dominated, sometimes ruthlessly, by capital, were expected to come to a reasonable accommodation at once with their former dictators. Human affairs do not work that way,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

on either a grand or a small scale. After one side has had its own way for generations, the other side will demand at least a spell of being the masters. The hope must be—and it has proved justified in some of the newly liberated lands—that after shorter innings the new masters will themselves be educated by events to see the benefits of some cooperation. Among only a few workers and managers has that truth been accepted so far.

Geography is a factor in politics. A country approximating a continent has two choices. Either the state must impose its will on the workers absolutely, as in Russia and China, and force its satellites to follow suit to prevent any outside rot from spreading to the main body politic. Or it can keep government aloof from industry and commerce, safeguarding the laissez faire by powers to intervene in a national extremity. To Britain, being a democracy, the first course is not open. Being an island, it was inevitable that the growing strength of the unions should become political.

The degree to which the House of Commons is the focal point in many affairs has not yet been sufficiently realized outside Britain. Thousands who are not interested in politics are aware of its proceedings. There is hardly an issue great or small—from the Russian threat in the Horn of Africa to the defective spectacles of an old lady in Hull—that will not end up one afternoon in the House of Commons. And when it does, the broadcasting media and the newspapers report the outcome. The affairs of the House of Commons range from matters of the most serious consequence to the most ridiculous. The rules of the House being what they are, it is an unenterprising member of Parliament who cannot find some way of raising a question. When I was director-general of the BBC, the extraordinarily high numbers of persons listening to the twenty-four party political broadcasts leading up to the general election of 1945, which dismissed Mr. Churchill and gave power to Mr. Attlee, led me to start a short report, given each evening, of *Today in Parliament*. That report, now obligatory, has not missed a sitting day of the House in thirty-three years. The people of the United Kingdom are daily aware of Parliament, in a way that Americans cannot be aware of what goes on in Congress or in their state legislatures.

It was inevitable, therefore, that when the organized workers began to seek influence they should do so through the House of Commons. How fast their progress would have been if the old Liberal Party had not fractured and collapsed is a political guessing game. That organized labor would become a prominent strand in the opposition to the Conservatives was certain. The Conservatives and the Liberals were the descendants of the Tories and the Whigs. For too long they alternated in control of the nation's interests, to the exclusion of the workers. Had the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Conservatives and the Liberals retained their monopoly of being alternative governments, then the Liberal Party today would have had to be at least as far to the left as Mr. Attlee's government was. But it would not have needed to be so largely financed by, and in consequence so influenced by, the trade unions as is the Labour Party. It is such an Opposition that some moderates in the present Conservative and Labour parties would like to create if they could come together.

No free nation lives by, or has its character formed by, politics alone. The mood of England today has spread beyond politics in many ways. But the nation's living standards now depend to a preponderant extent on the political margins within which they can be improved. The mood of Britain that gave Mr. Churchill the "pang of being flung out of office after having led the nation to the greatest of its victories" came at the end of six years during which a National Government had ruled the country and party politics had been dormant. The 1945 vote expressed a massive determination not to go back to the Britain of 1939. The class and other distinctions of those days were no longer tolerable. Egalitarianism was not envisaged: the English never like to go to extremes. True, Hugh Gaitskell, the moderate leader of the Labour opposition, as late as the mid-1950s held the view that an ideal society should have no one with an income of more than £2,000 a year after taxes. He could never have carried his party as a whole with him. Nevertheless there had to be social change.

It was the civilian rigors of war, particularly evacuation from the cities to the country in the early days, together with the mingling of the classes in the armed forces and in the factories, that triggered the revolt. Significantly, it was largely a revolt from above. The upper two-sevenths of the nation became uncomfortably aware of how the lower two-sevenths lived. I described one of the more striking results in the Haldane Lecture on "The Formation of Public Opinion," given at Birkbeck College, London, in 1958.

> Owing to the evacuation of children, the war brought large numbers of influential people into direct contact with, and to have personal responsibility for, children from slum homes in the great cities. What they discovered shook them considerably. By 1944 numerous groups and individuals were making inquiries and issuing reports (the introduction of family allowances, nutrition schemes, and much else owe a good deal to this experience).
>
> The attention of these people gradually concentrated on those children with the most difficult problems—those without families of their own to care for them and to be helped through the regular social services. Orphans and children removed from unfit parents were mostly living in Poor Law children's hostels or voluntary institutions. Suddenly the upheavals of war opened the doors of these places to many people who had no idea what they were like. They did not like what they saw. But neither the Education Act nor the plans for the health

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

service and reform of national assistance seemed to take any account of these "deprived" children. They seemed to have been overlooked by those responsible for "post-war reconstruction."

In March 1944 Lady Allen of Hurtwood, the chairman of the Nursery Schools Association, had circulated a memorandum on the need for an official inquiry. Getting no response from the Government she wrote a letter to *The Times*. . . . The response was staggering. Day after day and week after week the letters poured in. . . . When Parliament reassembled after the summer holidays 158 Members demanded an inquiry. Within four weeks the Government conceded it. . . . The Children's Act followed. A wholly new social service was brought into being.

This was a classic case of informed public opinion forcing action on apathetic politicians. It was also a demonstration of the fact that the English are a compassionate people. That compassion, it is now argued, has gone beyond the nation's means. Instances of its abuse, of its wastefulness through political and administrative ineptitude, are often cited. But no government in the foreseeable future, whatever its political composition, will dare to dismantle the welfare state.

While the drive for social reform came, in cases such as I have cited, from above, class divisions have been slow to blur in English society. Dr. Albert Henry Halsey, professor of social and administrative studies at Oxford University, has said in this year's stimulating Reith Lectures on the BBC that class has been losing its legitimacy, "and its persistent inequalities are less and less protected from challenge." He believes that in Britain "the social contract is being renegotiated" and that all the "arrangements for the social division of duty, wealth, and welfare are in debate, their principles and procedures in question."

One hopes this is true. The process is slow; it is also muddled. The erosion of aristocratic privilege is one thing. How our society should be redeployed is another. The political fount of new hereditary titles has dried up, and whether a Conservative government would set it flowing again is unknown. The number of Peers on company boards for which they are unqualified is being slowly reduced. There is now general agreement that the House of Lords should be modernized, the only strong opposition coming from those who would abolish it altogether. This would put the nation in great hazard because no one would then be safe from a majority of one in the House of Commons. The centuries-old record of English parliamentary history shows how wayward the Commons can be.

Today the future of British institutions is more important than that of class privilege. Historically Britain has lived and moved through her institutions. Some become fossilized; others grow otiose. But respect for long-established institutions such as the Royal Society, the ancient universities, the judiciary, and *The Times*, and for comparatively new ones

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

such as the BBC, has given the British people a collective ethos. Since the last war they have been lumped together as "the Establishment," an inviting target for iconoclasts. The fact that many of these institutions were far from being icons stimulated the onslaught.

The popularity of iconoclasm in England has many causes. The great change in the international status of Britain has bred uncertainty and doubt. For a long time there was refusal to acknowledge the extent of the change. A prime minister could be outraged because Britain's presence with America and Russia at the nuclear conference table was said to be only a matter of courtesy. When it was clear to everyone that in foreign affairs England had lost her muscle, people still insisted she could replace it with her moral leadership. Thousands of Britons, whether at the Association football cup final at Wembley or on the last night of the Promenade Concerts at the Albert Hall in London, sing "Rule, Britannia" and "Land of Hope and Glory," with its invocation—"Wider still and wider / Shall thy bounds be set. / God who made thee mighty / Make thee mightier yet"—fervently and without any sense of the ridiculous. (Happily, they also sing Blake's "Jerusalem," which is more relevant.)

Another cause of iconoclasm was the feeling that the reversal of Britain's fortunes was in some way due to the long-established components of national power. Could not greater wisdom and different actions have averted the catastrophe? No longer was authority trusted. Competence itself was questioned. While the middle classes felt there had been a *trahison des clercs*, particularly in the universities and in other intellectual circles, the broad base of the nation's social pyramid believed the "professionals" had let them down. Their pretensions to leadership had proved hollow. Every man and woman was as good as the next. "Gallant losers" acquired special merit, and the amateurs were preferred to the professionals. A striking example of this was a survey of a number of mass television programs carried out some years ago to find out which had the greatest public appeal. The survey showed that popular "appreciation" (not audience ratings) of these programs was in inverse order to the professionalism of their production. Those the producers judged the best were placed below those they thought the worst.

While these critical and sometimes potentially destructive attacks on established institutions, many of them historically free from government control, have been a feature of the past thirty years, the growth of government-created bodies has gone on unchecked. This is not an exclusively British development. The whole of Europe has seen governments spawning boards, agencies, and other bodies to carry out newly enforced functions. The Common Market is the most striking example. So far its

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bodies have caused irritation rather than antagonism. There is friction between Britain and her EEC partners. How far the England of tomorrow will be able to accommodate herself to Europe will be a test of her traditional gift for compromise.

British questioning of established values is more a revival than a new phenomenon. The adversary system of both law and politics in England is a mark of the national passion for argument: the English are the most disputatious people since the Greeks. What has changed is the scale of every debate, due to the new means of communication. Popular newspapers have a long history in England, but only in this century have their sales been counted in millions. Radio and television have multiplied those millions. It is not unfanciful, in the scale of today's world population, to regard England as the modern equivalent of the old Greek polis. The unprecedented use of referendums on whether the United Kingdom should join the Common Market, and the one promised on the devolution of powers to Scotland, heighten the comparison.

Never before have the English people been so vocal on so many issues at the same time. Public participation has been encouraged to the point where the only contribution of which some are capable is a display of incoherence. The fields of dissent are boundless. Government measures, social injustices, financial policy, industrial relations, classical and modern literature, new trends in music, the causes of England's defeats in international sport—all these and a host of others are vigorously argued about. Nothing is taken for granted. No serious book can appear without at once stimulating a counterview. Britain is indeed an isle full of noises. The impression given abroad is of a bitterly divided, atrabilious, quarreling society. What is actually happening is that a healthily skeptical English democracy is seeking to establish new foundations.

What kind of society will be built on these foundations? Will there always be an England? To take the question at no more than its verbal value, the answer is "Yes." An independent Scotland might well opt for Caledonia. If the Welsh Nationalists gained power, their passion for the revival of the Welsh language could lead them to insist that their country be called Cymru. Administrative regrouping has done away with some traditional English county names. But England will stay England "as far as Thought can reach."

Out of what in the larger sense England has been and is, a new England will have to grow. How radical will the changes be? The human desire for continuity is instinctive. Beliefs that nations do not change their characters are strong, but history belies them. The Greeks once led the world in philosophy and the arts. The Romans ruled a great empire with *gravitas*. The Swiss routed in battle the army of that Duke of Burgundy with whom this contribution opens. Even the "little England-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ers" of this century's first decade had no conception of how little England would become.

Élie Halévy, in his splendid *History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century,* saw the greatness of Victorian England as based on the British Navy and the Evangelical Movement. The power of both has gone. Religion of every kind is questioned. The Church of England is losing active adherents at an accelerating rate. Older people believe that much of the present amorality in the nation is due to the decline of the Church schools. That there has been a flight from moral rectitude, a loosening of honesty, and a lowering of standards is often attributed to the decline of religion generally. The ecumenical movement, if it ever fructifies, will weaken the Church of England even more. Its leaders and those of the Roman Catholic hierarchy may incline toward complete communion. (On whose terms is another question. There is too strong a Protestant tradition in England for its adherents meekly to be shepherded into a new fold.) The Crown as "Defender of the Faith" would also be in an invidious position—if by that time the title any longer mattered.

Although rarely considered in a religious context, the most significant and most pregnant change in post-1945 England has been the great increase in the immigrant population. Hindus, Muslims, Africans, Asians all bring their religions with them. G. K. Chesterton's fantasy of English mosques in *The Flying Inn* is now a reality. There are Sikh churches also. A family's church is a rallying point in an alien land. These people will not fall away from their faiths so quickly. They are demanding time for them on the BBC religious broadcasts.

The mass of the English people do not regard immigration as so acute a problem as some politicians think it is. There is more common ground in Parliament than the parties admit. Assimilation has gone more smoothly than was hoped. There are some confrontations and occasional clashes, which gain publicity because they are a relatively new occurrence. There are just as many disturbances among white sections of the community. As unemployment grew it was feared that the demand would be made for the immigrants to be dismissed first. This has not happened. True, the race laws prohibit this, but there is little evidence of any desire among the mass of the workers for such racial discrimination, even if it were legal.

We must accept that this mingling of the races to form the future population will have its effect. It will affect not only color, although the latest reliable estimate of the colored population is 1,800,000 out of a total of 56,000,000. A revival of world trade and a greater spread of prosperity among the nations will encourage the movement of professional men and workers to other countries within Europe. For a number

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of reasons, varying from the industrial depression to the specialists' dislike of being dictated to by their trade union ancillary workers, there is already a trickle from England to the Continent. Opportunities are now international. In better times there should be an inward flow. The makeup of the English people in A.D. 2000 will be markedly different from what it is today.

Given such a change, can traditional England, the England sentimentally invoked by Alice Duer Miller in *The White Cliffs*, be preserved? The answer lies in two estimates. First, to what degree will the newcomers shed their own national characteristics and adopt those of their new country? Here English and American inclinations are diametrically opposed. Israel Zangwill called the United States "the melting pot." For over a century Europe's millions and other emigrants to America have gone into that pot willingly. A few national idiosyncrasies might be preserved, but the desire for assimilation and overall uniformity has been great. The ardent desire of the newcomers has been to be as American as the rest of the nation. In Britain, on the other hand, the Scots have fought with increasing intensity to stay Scottish, and their demand for some governance of their own way of life is now being conceded. The Welsh have their language as an added spur to singularity. While the English have no desire for fragmentation, there is a more determined preservation of individuality among Yorkshiremen, Cornishmen, and Kentishmen than there is among the natives of most American states.

At the same time, England, being the major part of a small island, has a more distinctive national ethos than there can be throughout a continent. The English propagated that ethos overseas in Britain's imperial days among the very people who are now asking to be admitted to its society. Many of them come with English ideas of democracy, of justice, of literature, of the arts, and of sport (a strong expression of national attitudes). Whatever their color, they are less alien to their new country's way of life than were the nineteenth-century immigrants to the United States. The chances of a peaceful and beneficent absorption are thereby increased.

The second estimate is whether the newcomers will make a contribution of their own to the character of the England of tomorrow. Immigrants can be a lasting enrichment, no matter what temporary problems they may pose. The English themselves are the amalgam of a long line of invaders, intruders, and men and women seeking asylum. The Huguenots gave a strengthening tincture to the English character. The Jews and other central European refugees who fled to England in the 1930s benefited the English in many walks of life. On a lesser plane, the Notting Hill annual carnival of the Negroes of London is an expression

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of an inherent gaiety that England's sobersides society, sometimes verging on drabness, should wholeheartedly welcome. There have of course been troubles, news of which has gone around the world. But these were not intrinsic to the carnival. They were fomented by troublemakers. The same disturbances have erupted where there were no immigrants. Violence is threatening to become endemic in many nations. In England the immigrants are its victims, not its cause.

These two answers presuppose that the English character will not change of its own volition. I do not believe that in fundamentals it will. There have always been slow swings of the pendulum: Cavaliers, Puritans, Restoration licentiousness, Victorian prudery, today's permissiveness. None of these has altered the essential kindness, the passion for fair play, the respect for law, and the hatred of intolerance of ordinary English men and women—a certain laziness also, it must be confessed. Exertion only when it is needed is a national instinct. Merrie England was beer and dancing around the maypole. Exertion will be total and fierce when emergency calls for it; the difficulty is to persuade the British people that there ever is an emergency.

Fashions, manners, morals swing back and forth. The instinctive virtues survive the changes. So does the English love of romance. England has traditionally been a land of poets. If there are no mute Miltons today—the radio would have given them voice long ago if they had existed—it is because genius is the wayward chance of centuries; we enjoy a host of poets on a lower plane. In drama, the postwar London stage has been rewardingly experimental; England has some of the finest actors and actresses in the world. The renascence in music has not yet exhausted itself. Books new and old pour from the publishers. Editing on the grand scale of the great English classics has had to be relinquished to American scholarship financed by American resources. In some outstanding cases, such as the full, unexpurgated, brilliantly edited *Diary of Samuel Pepys*, there has been a happy and bountiful American-English partnership. England can stand on her own in works on philosophy, history, criticism, the arts, and fiction, and is doing so.

During last year's celebrations of the Queen's first twenty-five years on the throne, there was little reference to "the new Elizabethan Age" that her coronation had romantically heralded in the public mind. Rampant inflation, recourse to the International Monetary Fund, a million and a half unemployed, and other realities made such fancies inappropriate. But insofar as the first Elizabethan Age was a blossoming in brightest colors of many flowers in the seedbed of the English character, the aspiration remains. A new generation should enjoy better conditions in which to fulfill it. Talking and listening to the young, one is convinced the seeds are there.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ohio

JOHN UPDIKE

I

Rolling along through Ohio,
lapping up Mozart on the radio
(Piano
Concerto No. 21, worn but pure),
having awoken while dawn
was muddying a rainy sky,
I learned what human was:
human was the music,

natural was the static
blotting out arpeggios
with clouds of idiot rage,
exploding, barking, blind.
The stars sit athwart our thoughts
just so.

II

To be fair, though, about that day—
dull sky, scuds of goldenrod,
fields dried flat, the plains hinting
at a tornado,
the choleric sun
a pillowed sort of face upon
which an antic wisp of cirrus
had set a moustache—

at dawn, I remembered all day,
I had parked beneath an overpass
to check my lights, and breathed
the secret green, the rain.
Like hammered melody the empty road
soared east and west. No static. Air.

JOHN UPDIKE is well known for his novels, poetry and criticism. His latest book, *Tossing and Turning*, is a collection of poems.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Rowing on Eaton-Brook Lake at Twilight

Gregory Djanikian

Here, in this dark,
he could be anyone—
Jon Lang

I know this lake's end
where bass and sunfish loaf

and nose by the edge, where
the silence settling in

among cattail and
pickerelweed tells me

now's the right time
to be alone on the water.

Everything stills to a quiet
as I push off

knowing each stroke will take me
that much further

from what I know: grackles
disappear in the white pine,

the weeds thin, and the only
keepsake that follows me

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out is my stern-line dragging
some memory of what

it was tied to once. It's
darker than it was,

and here, at mid-lake, with
my oar-blades leveled, I'm wondering

how long I must wait tonight
before I find out

just what's keeping me here
guessing at whatever it is

I am, or have become
through this hour's hard rowing.

GREGORY DJANIKIAN is a teacher/poet in the New York State Poets-in-the-Schools Program. His poems have appeared in the *Nation* and other journals.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Handstand

PAUL PETRIE

After days of hurling her body
down on her hands—
and galumphing back, rear bent,
soles aching—and hours at recess
of standing against the wall
with the other girls, face down,
her coat shrouding her head
she says, "Watch this!" and runs,
throws down her hands and rises
up—back arched, her toe-tips
grazing the wall, shoves out
and stands—
supremely poised.

Evolution,
what do you have to offer
beyond this?

Gulls at the windows flash white wings
and squeal
applause.

I smack her on the rear
and down she tumbles,
giggling on the floor.

● PAUL PETRIE teaches in the English department at the University of Rhode Island. His most recent collection of poetry is *The Academy of Goodbye*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On Reading Books

A Barbarian's Cogitations

ALEXANDER GERSCHENKRON

READING BOOKS IS A SLOW PROCESS. True, Sigismond Busch in Zola's *L'Argent* is said to have read the first volume of *Das Kapital* in a single night. And Thomas Mann lets Senator Buddenbrook duplicate the feat by making him read, between second breakfast and afternoon tea, the whole of Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. But perhaps Zola and Mann need not be taken too seriously. Busch obviously misunderstood what he had read, a circumstance for which Zola paid by incurring everlasting disapproval on the part of Marxian writers from Engels to Lukács. And the melancholy, fey senator may not have read more than the famous chapter "Death and Its Relation to Our Being Per Se."

At any rate, apart from these ambiguously impressive achievements, reading is tantalizingly time consuming, at least for the average barbarian. The total number of books we read is surprisingly small. I happen to be in the habit of putting down consecutively in a large notebook the title of every book I read, together with the corresponding date. A few years ago on my sabbatical leave, feeling relaxed and perhaps a little bored, I sat down to count the titles listed over the preceding ten years. The annual figure varied somewhat depending on how much writing I did during a given year. But it never fell below ninety and never rose above one hundred and ten, yielding a clear average of one hundred books per year. My list did not include journal articles or parts of books that I had had to consult for research purposes. For the rest, it was comprehensive and included scholarly books, novels to the last mystery story, volumes of short stories—in short, every book that I have read from cover to cover and that I can judge as an entity.

I wish I had known long before I did my little sums that an adult, over the fifty or sixty years of his reading-life span, can read no more than five or six thousand books. This is a depressingly small number even if one does not compare it with the annual accessions to Widener Library at Harvard, which amount to some seventy thousand. To be sure, Lord

ALEXANDER GERSCHENKRON, Walter S. Barker Professor of Economics Emeritus at Harvard University, was born in Russia in 1904. He is the author of a number of books on economics, most recent among them *An Economic Spurt That Failed*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Acton was believed to consume a book daily. But I am just not in his class, and I suspect few men are. Every book I read is a not altogether negligible portion of my lifetime reading. Why did I not follow a careful program? Why did I give free reign to my curiosity? Why did I allow myself to engage in those wild sprees of desultory and promiscuous reading? Why did I not limit myself strictly to *good* books? To be sure, I could not have done so with regard to professional books. All sorts of books have to be reviewed. Sometimes it is in criticizing a poor book that useful thoughts occur to you. Many a constructive thought has its origin in polemics. That is how the better new often replaces the inferior old. Professor Hans Kelsen's celebrated Pure Theory of Law was formulated and elaborated in critical rejection of the "traditional" theory. But surely, when it comes to the vast area of literary art, there at least I should have read nothing but *good books*—provided, of course, that I knew how to separate the wheat from the chaff, the meal from the bran. I suppose I should have known. I certainly do now. I have reliable yardsticks that I daresay will not satisfy the literary expert who looks for fine and subtle distinctions. But an economist, a barbarian by definition, an average reader of belles lettres, can do with three simple criteria: A good book must be (1) interesting, (2) memorable, and (3) rereadable.

The first criterion goes back at least as far as Voltaire, who used to approve of every genre except the boring one. It is unnecessary to define in general terms what makes a book interesting. The outward symptoms speak a clear language: the inability to put a book down, the compelling urge to go on reading coupled with a growing sadness as the number of remaining pages dwindles and the moment approaches when the magic will be all over. The varying intensity of those conflicting emotions is a perfectly natural measure of the degree to which a book captures our interest.

But what happens after we have bid farewell to a book? The good book must be memorable, and the average man's average memory is a good criterion. True, the memory of a book may be repressed, but this will occur only in the rare cases where it happened to hit your neuralgic point. By and large, memory can be relied upon to retain what is worth retaining. A book that evaporates without leaving a trace may be safely considered poor, even though it may have engaged one's interest as long as one kept turning its pages. Most mystery stories clearly belong to this probably enormous group, the few exceptions serving to corroborate the rule. Nobody knows for sure whether he has read *The Case of the Lonely Widow* or *The Body with a Missing Toe*. But whoever, in reply to the question "Have you read *Hamlet*?" or "Have you read *War and Peace*?" would wrinkle his brow in a futile effort of remembrance and say, "I might have, but I don't remember"?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Once this criterion is accepted, surprises are bound to come. For one does not have to descend to the swamps of trashy entertainment to acquire the dubious gift of forgetfulness. The line between remembering and forgetting lies close to the summit. I happen to know that I have read Dostoevsky's *Adolescent*, but I have no more than the vaguest idea of what the novel is about. Chekhov wrote a story called "The Peasants," and Ivan Bunin wrote one called *The Village*. The two pieces are not unalike in that neither story continues the sentimental populist tradition. Both writers saw peasants clearly as what they were—ignorant and cruel barbarians, sunk in debasing misery. Bunin, the Nobel Prize winner of 1933, was one of the great masters of the Russian language. I have read his story at least three times, but I could not possibly retell its contents. In contrast, the story by Chekhov—whom, incidentally, the Swedish Academy in its inscrutable wisdom failed to honor—is absolutely memorable. You need only to lean back and think of the story, and scenes, image after image, begin to pass before your eyes, until you feel that you must reach for the book on your shelf and read it again, thus providing the third criterion of the story's greatness—which, paradoxical as it may appear, is closely connected with the second criterion, as it naturally is with the first. Well-remembered books are also eminently rereadable. I have read *War and Peace* at least fifteen times, and it is still as rereadable as ever. I do not think it contains a paragraph that appears unfamiliar to me as I come across it. Yet on every perusal I never fail to discover something new in this inexhaustible store of observations, insights, ideas, and images that the previous readings have failed to reveal—to say nothing of the infinite pleasure of drifting again along the stream of that language, so simple and so beautiful, so true to the Horatian ideal of *simplex munditiis*. A book like this is rereadable *senz'altro*, and at least twice I began rereading *War and Peace* at once, starting again after having read the last page.

But there is, of course, more to it than that. In a familiar book you find unsuspected novelties that you previously overlooked—not just because of your inability to absorb all its richness on one reading, but also because, as time goes by, the years work their imperceptible change in you. Men of my age like to speak of growing maturity, of clearer understanding deepened by experience. Perhaps—although what is whipped away beyond retrieval by the *fugaces anni* as often as not is the fiery intensity of emotions of a young soul, the insatiable interest of the newcomer in his surroundings. I had read Chekhov's works at the age of fifteen and did not reread them until ten years later. This was an amazing experience. At the second reading I understood for the first time how gray and gloomy, how desperately unhappy Chekhov's characters were. The burning curiosity of the youngster, so eager to learn about the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

world around him in which everything was exciting, made him overlook how horribly unexciting was the life of Chekhov's heroes and heroines, so full of meaningless cares and worries, little fears and shallow joys, picayune ambitions and weak emotions. But this also meant that the adolescent was much better able than the young man, into which he was to grow, to exercise an *Einfühlung* into all those insignificant people and see their lives, not as an outside observer, but from the inside as one of them.

At times, however, rereading performs a different function: it serves to recall to us ourselves as we were a long time ago. This is surely true of the great children's books. When we reread *Tom Sawyer,* or *Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant,* or *Il Cuore* by De Amicis, or Andersen's *Fairy Tales,* we often succeed in re-creating our childhood and reliving the wonderful experience of the first reading. As I reread the story of the Italian boy in *Il Cuore,* I can suddenly recall and understand why I was so vastly amused by a certain sentence that, I am sure, would not evoke a smile if I were to read the book for the first time now. And I am able again to feel a Russian boy's amazement at that curious Italian grade school where sons of doctors and factory owners sat side by side with the progeny of grocers and coal burners. For in normal circumstances—which to me was Russia in the early years of the century—only boys of "good" families went to reputable schools; the rest either did not go to school at all or went for very few years to very inferior schools that hardly deserved the appellation. But this operation does not work with every book read in childhood. With inferior books one's remembrance is blotted out by the triviality, or pomposity, or stylistic poverty of the stories. Here again only good books are rereadable, and the recall is possible because one never really forgot Tom Sawyer's showing-off before Becky or the moment of fleeting glory of Andersen's sad and silly Christmas tree.

The three criteria must be taken conjointly. A book may satisfy one or even two of the criteria and still not qualify as a good book. A mystery thriller may be interesting enough as long as one keeps turning its pages, but it is quite likely to slip from one's memory forever the moment the plane has landed. And one does not have to descend to the basement dwellings of literature in order to find cases of that type. We all know that Dostoevsky was a great writer. No one is likely to forget *The Brothers Karamazov* or *Crime and Punishment.* And either book can be reread many times. But Dostoevsky also wrote very different novels. I mentioned earlier my inability to recall the content of *The Adolescent.* I might reread it *because* I do not remember it. In other words, the novel passes the third criterion because it has failed the second. One of the reasons why memory proves refractory and unreliable when confronted with so much of Dostoevsky—while it so readily and unfailingly absorbs

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tolstoy—may lie in the peculiarities of Dostoevsky's language. No doubt he could write magnificently, as witness the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor," in *The Brothers Karamazov*. But most of the time he wrote—had to write—hastily, using the abominable, slovenly lingo of the little civil servants in Saint Petersburg. Readers of Dostoevsky in translation may not be aware of the fact, as no translator could dare offer an equivalent rendition of Dostoevsky's style and no publisher would accept the poor English that a true translation would yield. But whatever the reasons, all I want to emphasize here is the inseparability of the three criteria.

Are these criteria too stringent? They may be, because they apply clearly and convincingly to the *di majores* of the literary Olympus and begin to fail with its lesser denizens, to say nothing of the inhabitants of the valleys and the arid plains. Still, it seems to me that it is wiser to err on the side of stringency. I suggest that we all tend to read the wrong things. After a lifetime spent over books, I still find that the list of masterpieces I have not read is depressingly long. Moreover, we are likely to read too much and to reread too little. There are several reasons for this misallocation of our reading time—which, alas, is so scarce—and none of them appears to be very respectable.

First of all, we like to keep up with the Joneses who are, if not omnivorous, certainly voracious in their reading. They read everything on the best-seller list, and a good deal more. Modern novels, then, are the stuff our conversations on social occasions, particularly in mixed company, are made of. For we know that we must not talk shop, and neither baseball, nor football, nor boxing is any longer the respectable topic it used to be a generation ago. And as far as politics is concerned, in the dark days while the war in Vietnam followed its unsteady course, arousing deep and conflicting emotions, the rule of friendly social gatherings was the same as that valid in France during the Dreyfus affair: "Ici on ne discute pas l'affaire." Thus we read in order to be able to talk about what we read at cocktail parties and social dinners. And the rules of polite conversation seem also to require us to praise rather than to criticize. It would be humiliating to admit that most of what we read is inferior and probably not worth reading at all. Besides, consensus goes well with togetherness and the former is more easily achieved by admiring rather than by detracting.

But where do the Joneses get their reading lists? Their pattern of consumption of goods, from cigarettes to dishwashers, is laid down for them by Madison Avenue. Very similarly, their pattern of reading is predetermined by the reviews they read in daily newspapers and various magazines. What is the character of these reviews? In Russia under Stalin the writers of reviews found out that it was safer to underpraise

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

than to overpraise. As a result, most reviews tended to be negative. Our own situation is rather the reverse. Our reviewers as a group are a friendly crowd. In doubt they praise, and they seldom doubt that the thing to do is to praise.

There are several likely reasons to explain this attitude. It must be rather intolerable for a man who is a professional review writer to feel that his main function is to serve as an intellectual garbage remover. It is far more pleasant to deal with high-quality goods. To keep on saying, bluntly or blandly as the style may be, that book after book might just as well have remained unwritten must surely be quite depressing. It is not easy to reconcile oneself to the idea that we live in a period of literary decline that is perhaps without precedent in modern times. It is ever so much nicer to feel that the literary age into which our short life span falls is an interesting, if not exciting, period—so that to be alive now is, if not heaven, at least some sort of bliss. In addition, as in conversations, there are the rules of polite behavior in a society that places a premium on being nice to your contemporaries, quite apart from the fact that the social value system tends toward optimism. Life is good, except for the things that cannot be remedied and reformed. And since no one knows the treatments, the recipes, and the spiritual message to cure people of writing indifferent books and induce them to produce masterpieces instead, it is just as well to say that the literature of our days is good.

In reality it is not—or, rather, the books that have merit are few and far apart, and they either pass unnoticed or else are noticed for the wrong reasons. Books are praised that you forget as soon as you put them down. I have read two novels by a certain modern writer and all I remember of one is that the heroine had virtually no breasts, but was "a mistress of the quick lay"; and of the other that a girl, after a somewhat premature copulation, calls the man an "uncircumcised swine"—a rather improbable ejaculation. What has stuck in my mind from Mary McCarthy's *The Group* is that it contains a circumstantial statement on the technology of deflowering, but I have been unable to retain even the details of the scene that constitutes the climax of the book or the names or characters of the twosome involved. Since it is the scene that most likely accounts for the selling success of the book, one is hardly mistaken in believing that it has been inserted in the novel with a shrewd anticipation of such success; just as Lawrence Durrell, aware of the intolerable drabness of his *Alexandria Quartet*, tried to dissipate the cloud of boredom that hangs so heavily over its pages by conjuring up out of nowhere an aggressive crowd of child prostitutes.

With a modicum of goodwill toward the reading public, the reviewers should be able to recognize trash for what it is and issue appropriate warnings. But the goodwill, or rather the critical ability of our critics, is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wanting. Their approval is readily obtained when the novels they review deal with subjects they believe to be interesting and the only thing that is lacking is the writer's talent as a novelist. C. P. Snow has been compared to Galsworthy. But the author of *The Man of Property*, who, too, wrestled with momentous social problems, knew well how to use the English language and he at least could make his creations speak for themselves. Snow not only lets his flat style disgrace every page he writes, but also betrays complete helplessness as an artist and must keep explaining why his heroes did or said this or that—surely the most convincing *testimonium paupertatis* a novelist can produce for himself. The simple, unvarnished truth, of course, is that whatever Snow has had to say should have been written down in short and unassuming essays. They would be short because the few thoughts Snow had to communicate in *The Masters* or *Corridors of Power* would have hardly lent themselves to any extended treatment. The unassuming character of the essays would follow naturally from both the depth of Snow's thoughts and the poverty of his style.

It is perhaps only natural that critics who let Snow get away with the artistic form of his novels—or rather the absence thereof—are easily satisfied when a well-known and much discussed problem of our times is painted over with a light coat of cheap allegory. Both Ionesco and Max Frisch fastened their attention on the problem of conformity and acceptance of evil. The history of Nazism in Germany and of Communism under Stalin provides plenty of material to spread the knowledge of people's attitudes and behavior. All the two writers do—one in introducing his zoo of rhinoceroses and the other his gang of incendiaries—is to repeat once more something that has been known *ad nauseam* and *ad horrorem*. What is justified when the allegory makes us suddenly understand something that has remained hidden from us is ridiculous when the writers want to explain the clear and obvious by the obscure and abstruse.

If critics are captured by shallow devices of this sort, one should not be astonished at their willingness to swallow bold attempts at experimentation in the modern novel. Alain Robbe-Grillet, or Nathalie Sarraute, or Michel Butor is welcomed as showing the proper ways to lift the novel to new heights. "Modernity" is "an OK word," and the delighted critic believes he finds here clear examples of the modern novel in the making. There is no doubt that these novels are tailor-made for reviews to be written about them. For what is new in them consists mostly in not saying clearly, or rather saying as obscurely as possible, what actually happens. There is a girl; she is killed; who did it? But perhaps she was not killed, and quite possibly there never was any girl. In one of Robbe-Grillet's novels, *Les Gommes*, there is a drunkard who spends his days

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sitting at a table in a tavern, eager to put puzzles (*poser des devinettes*) to all customers. This is precisely what Robbe-Grillet does in his novels, thus being a double of his own minor hero—a device borrowed from Hitchcock movies where the director regularly appears in a very minor mute part. All this is the critic's *wahrer Himmel*, to use Goethe's phrase. He can never be at a loss as to what to put into his review. All he has to do is to start solving the puzzles contained in the novel. And since the puzzles are many and the number of possible solutions very large, the critic can plunge lustily into his job, with the comfortable feeling that he is never in danger of being wrong—because anything goes—while blackening his pages with the least possible effort.

The obvious advantages are not confined to the critic. For the readers, too, can engage in the same game, and derive their share of satisfaction from it. In a sense, the "modern" novel is only an extreme form of a tendency that has been in evidence for a long time. For we have had a flow of novels, and particularly poetry, generously sprinkled with allusions to all sorts of abstruse sources or with laboriously constructed symbols. These writers, too, kept the readers busy deciphering the allusions and explaining the symbols. In fact, the readers were so busy that they had no time at all to appreciate the artistic value of the pages they were interpreting. Considering this effect, one cannot help praising the novelists and verse makers for cleverly using the device to deflect the reader's attention and to escape the brunt of his strictures. Those who like crossword puzzles, anagrams, and other brain twisters, but have had qualms of conscience about poring over them, naturally have welcomed the new novel because it gives the opportunity to do brain twisters while being engaged in an allegedly much more cultivated pastime. And while a brain twister may prove to exceed the intellectual powers of the would-be solver, the puzzles of the new novels are always soluble, precisely because they offer so many possible solutions. Reading novels of this kind can be likened to the game of croquet in Wonderland, where everybody wins and no one loses.

Along with facilitating the job of the critic, the new novel no doubt gladdens the heart of the average instructor. Interpreting trivialities is an easy job. It is not like teaching the profundities of Shakespeare or Goethe where one is bound by an uneasy sense of responsibilities. Every new book gives professors of literature material for at least five lectures, and the students blink in wonderment: "So that is what he meant! I see now, the man was on his return trip when he saw her. And I thought it happened when he was going out." The author does not tell you clearly whether his hero is coming or going, nor does the reader know whether he himself is coming or going. Nor is it really important to know which is which. Still, there is something to figure out, and that sustains interest in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the reading. One becomes just a little bit like Gogol's Petrushka in *Dead Souls*, who just enjoyed the process of reading. The resemblance is not perfect because the semi-literate Petrushka kept marveling at how cleverly all this was arranged—letters forming themselves into words and words into sentences. And here the reader just strains his sight trying to look through the fog that the author has blown onto his pages, wondering about those indistinct shapes. Then the last page is read, the book is closed and quickly forgotten. The tricks, the puzzles, the confusion appear exquisitely irrelevant in retrospect and vanish from the reader's mind—leaving the dim feeling, however, that the experience was on the whole a rather frustrating one and there is no desire to repeat it by rereading the book. It is perfectly sufficient unto the reader's purpose to have read it and to be able to reveal the fact by putting in a knowing remark about it at a cocktail or dinner party.

The crisis of the novel, need for experiments, creation of new devices, new ways of seeing things, the new so-called objective novel, in which no one knows what the objects are—all these much advertised things melt away into nothingness the moment a real novel appears. Giuseppe di Lampedusa's *The Leopard*, Stig Dagerman's *Bränt Barn*, Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle* demonstrate in their different ways one and the same thing: once a man has something important to say and has the talent, the novel, the "old" novel, is again as young as ever. It entrances the reader, engraves itself upon his memory, and evokes the desire to return to the book in order to live once more through the sensations of the first reading. "Novelty" in the novel suddenly appears to be a will-o'-the-wisp, to be immaterial and unnecessary. Lampedusa may be reminiscent of Stendhal, but he is as fresh and new as though Stendhal had never written. The truth is that a real writer has no "theory of the novel"; or rather, if, like Zola, he believes he has one, it does not help him at all. He simply writes, and what he writes will be interesting, memorable, and rereadable.

One is tempted at times to forget all the talk about the modern novel, its theory and its experiments. But, I am afraid, the temptation must be resisted. We cannot brush it aside and sweep it from our minds. For the stuff is not innocuous. It is positively harmful. It has exercised considerable influence on the taste of readers. They have been trained to look for the wrong things and to judge a work of art by fallacious criteria. The feeling for the harmony of form and content, the very essence of an artistic performance, is lost. Novels are judged by the perfection of the structure and the writer's ability to disguise his meaning. A truly great novel like *Doctor Zhivago*, with its magnificent language, immensely rich in vision and thought, arouses disappointment because its structure is not as perfect as that of, say, a contemporary novelist whose career has

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been spent in an American university. This is not a very new situation. It goes back at least to the beginning of the century, when Tolstoy wistfully remarked that any one of the young writers knew ten times more about the structure of the novel than either Turgenev or Tolstoy himself, but was deplorably in want of anything significant to communicate to the reader. And along with the one-sided preference for good carpentry (which is provided nowadays by any artisan writer), and the predilection for being puzzled and confused, goes also the fear of simple genuine feelings. Chekhov's *Lady with the Dog* arouses distrust. The reader wonders whether it is not "sentimental." For good writing must be tough, and the description of the wonder of a deep attachment coming late in life, as happens in Chekhov's story, is everything else but tough. Unless a girl is raped in an unorthodox way with the help of a corncob, as occurs in Faulkner's *Sanctuary*, or a woman's breast is sheared off, as happens in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, the reader is likely to regard the book as a hopelessly dated product of a bygone romantic past.

What is obviously needed is a transvaluation of values, or rather a revaluation in the literal sense of a return to an appreciation of a literary art that is both much simpler and at the same time more profound than the esoteric exercises which people have been trained to regard as literature. Such a return is not easy. It will involve much more than adherence to the three criteria that a nonliterary barbarian has presented in these pages. But the criteria may not be entirely useless, at least in principle. Possibly they could help some readers in discriminating more resolutely and in rejecting more boldly. Perhaps—but I am just ruminating, and I do not want to be giving advice; as Goethe said, asking for advice betrays weakness and giving advice betrays arrogance. Anyhow, the trouble with this sort of advice would be that one has to read a book before our criteria can be applied to it. An apple has to be bitten into before we know that it is sour and should be thrown away.

Thus we shall all probably go on reading mediocre if not trashy stuff. But willingness to recognize it as such would constitute indubitable progress. If every time we have made that triste discovery we should turn back to rereading an old master, our felicific balance sheet would show immense improvement.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mind from Matter?

MAX DELBRÜCK

SØREN KIERKEGAARD, in a diary entry for 1846, writes:

> . . . That a man should simply and profoundly say that he cannot understand how consciousness comes into existence—is perfectly natural. But that a man should glue his eye to a microscope and stare and stare and stare—and still not be able to see how it happens—is ridiculous, and it is particularly ridiculous when it is supposed to be serious. . . . If the natural sciences had been developed in Socrates' day as they are now, all the sophists would have been scientists. One would have hung a microscope outside his shop in order to attract custom, and then would have had a sign painted saying: "Learn and see through a giant microscope how a man thinks" (and on reading the advertisement Socrates would have said: "That is how men who do not think behave").

In this essay I propose, and propose seriously, to do that ridiculous thing, "look through the microscope," to try to understand how consciousness—or, more general, how mind—comes into existence. And with mind, how language, how the notion of truth, how logic, mathematics, the sciences have come into the world. Ridiculous or not, to look for the evolutionary origin of mind today is no longer an idle speculation. It has become an approachable, natural—an unavoidable—question.

We know enough about the history of the universe, the galaxies, the stars, the planets, and our own planet to be certain that the earth started without life, forming its earliest rocks 3.8 billion years ago. We also know that life on earth today is unmistakably monophyletic. It is based universally on nucleic acids and proteins; it universally involves the same genetic code; each amino acid is coded for by the same triplet of bases in the nucleic acids; the ribosomes, transfer RNAs, and charging enzymes are manifestly related; the proteins in their amino acid sequences and in their folding patterns clearly display their descent from common ancestors. The ancestry can be dated back, by the pre-Cambrian geological record, to at least 3.1 billion years ago, not long after the formation of

---

MAX DELBRÜCK, a professor of biology at the California Institute of Technology since 1947, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1969 for his work in molecular biology. This essay is adapted from a lecture given at the XIII Nobel Conference at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, which will be published this summer in a book entitled *The Nature of Life* edited by William H. Heidcamp.

© University Park Press 1978

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the oldest rocks. Life cannot have flown in from outer space: there is none and never was any on the other planets, and none would survive the exposure to cosmic rays during the journey from the far reaches of the universe. The cosmic ray intensity in interstellar space is high. What is actually formed in outer space, by radiation, is the "soup" from which organic molecules are easily formed, that is, the molecules H_2O, NH_3, CH_2O, $HC{\equiv}N$, $HC{\equiv}C{-}C{\equiv}N$.

Thus there is a clear case for the transition on earth from no-life to life. How this happened is a fundamental, perhaps *the* fundamental, question of biology. The difficulty is not that we can't dream up schemes of how it might have happened. Hundreds of possible schemes can and have been proposed. The difficulty lies in the lack of data: there is *no* geological record of "pre-biotic evolution." On the contrary, there is an immense gap between all present-day life and no-life, a gap that has widened enormously during the last decades as the essential unity and immense complexity of all present-day molecular genetics have become apparent.

The unity and continuity of life on earth is manifest in its anatomy, down to the molecular anatomy. It is manifest equally in its psychic aspects. The beginnings of perception are clearly present in micro-organisms—in adaptive behavior, permitting the organisms to detect and evaluate signals from the environment, and to respond to them appropriately. Is the behavior we see in these situations straight deterministic? Does it involve decision elements in situations of conflict? Suppose a bacterium is subjected to a chemotactic stimulus, an attractant or a repellant? How will it decide how to respond? By a fixed formula? By reference to past experience? The answers to these questions are known. The responses of microorganisms to signals from the environment occur at two levels: First, the swimming pattern is a stop-go pattern. During the "stop," random rotational diffusion determines in a stochastic way the next direction of "go"; the duration of "go," and thereby the length of the "go" section, is determined by the signal. The result is a "random walk," a biased random walk, biased in the direction toward higher concentration of an attractant, toward lower concentration of a repellant. Second, the detection of the signal involves an adaptation mechanism, quite similar to the light and dark adaptation of our eyes: the organism sets its level of detection in accordance with the average intensity of the stimulus (concentration of chemical, intensity of light, and so on). Thus we have in bacteria all three components: deterministic response, stochastic response, and response based on (immediate) past experience.

It is a long way from these primitive "decisions" to the machinery

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

involved in the decision of a young man to propose marriage to his girlfriend. He responds to her charm with his emotional brain (the midbrain) and his thinking brain (the cortex). His decision is influenced by his genes, by his imprinting in earliest childhood, by his identity as it detached itself from his mother, by his moral upbringing, by his economic circumstances, by his surging sex drive, and so on.

Let us trace this long way in order to get a feeling for its continuity. How do we reconstruct the tree of life? How do we identify the common ancestors of the currently living forms? In the first place by digging and dating, by paleontology—that is, finding hard parts that survived the ages (bones and hard parts of invertebrates, impressions, petrified structures). We date the specimens by a variety of physical techniques and try to establish their relations to each other and to currently living forms. In some cases procedures of this kind can take us very far back, as in some sulfur deposits whose isotope ratios indicate a biological action of sulfate-reducing organisms 10^9 years ago. On the whole, paleontological methods are the *only* ones that give us direct evidence of our ancestors. Much richer, however, is the evidence from comparative anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry of living forms. These methods tell us who is related to whom and how closely. They permit us to infer some properties of actual common ancestors but not those of sidelines that became extinct; no amount of study of present forms would permit us to infer dinosaurs.

Most far-reaching of the comparative approaches is the comparative study of informational molecules: proteins and nucleic acid. Very rapid progress is being made with the advent of efficient methods of determining sequences of amino acids in proteins, of bases in nucleic acids, and the folding patterns of proteins.

What is emerging from these studies is an outline of the family tree of life-styles among the prokaryotes, especially the family tree of their ways and means to secure the basic element of their chemical energy currency—adenosine triphosphate (ATP): from fermenters to sulfate reducers, to photosynthetic mechanisms, these culminating in the liberation of O_2 into the atmosphere and the O_2 in turn permitting the evolution of oxygen respiration.

It is believed that these advanced methods of efficient energy metabolism paved the way to the next big leap: the evolution of eukaryotes—cells with larger genomes, too large to handle with a single chromosome and therefore needing the elaborate maneuver of mitosis, the ordered distribution of several chromosomes to daughter cells. Together with this elaboration we find the alternation of haploid and diploid phases of the life cycle, of strict bisexuality, of meiosis. Here again we have a big gap: all the things just mentioned seem to be there without having left traces of transitional forms. In recent years it has been found that even the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

most primitive fungi have a meiosis which follows the strict rules long known from higher organisms: two meiotic divisions with suppression of one cycle of chromosome replication; crossing over in the four-strand stage; synapsis of the homologous chromosomes with formation of a well-defined elaborate synaptinemal complex.

Here, as in the pre-biotic stage, there must have been a vast number of alternative lines that died out without leaving a trace in the progeny, that did not survive the rigors of natural selection. The present eukaryote cells may actually constitute barnyards full of domesticated creatures, their organelle for oxidative phosphorylation (the mitochondrion) having been derived from a symbiotic relation with a bacterium, possibly paracoccus, and that the green plants derived their organelle for photosynthesis (the chloroplast) from certain photosynthetic bacteria, specifically from a recently discovered species that contains both chlorophylls a and b.

By whatever means, innumerable devices got invented and assembled for the vast diversification of multicellular life-styles: of habitat, of locomotion, of food types, of food gathering, of internal management, of social behavior, including, above all, mating behavior. From this stage on, the unit of natural selection in exclusively sexually propagating groups is no longer the individual but the "local population of actually interbreeding individuals." Local populations interconnected by a slight gene flow between them constitute a new entity, the species.

Complex social behavior, complex nervous system, and complex mind evolve together in animals. Why not in plants? Plants, too, respond to signals of various modalities; they, too, respond with fantastic sensitivity. Plants, too, have to coordinate these signals. They, too, have complex mating behavior. They, too, have circulation of body fluids. But plants differ from animals as Germany does from France—by having much less centralization. Germany could be dismembered and continue to thrive. France without Paris and Paris without France are unthinkable.

Mind requires an organization with a strong center, the central nervous system, so we will stick with animals in this discussion. Crudely we can speak of the development of the central nervous system of vertebrates as occurring in three stages—brain stem, midbrain, and cortex—corresponding to the regulation of vegetative functions (breathing and circulation), programs for fixed behavior patterns in response to external stimuli (midbrain), and conscious, thought-controlled behavior (cortex).

The cortex is the organ of perception, of ideation, of consciousness, of language. Four big words. Let us look at them in turn.

Naïvely, one may imagine that, say, visual perception is the image on your retina as seen by your conscious mind. Not so; many steps intervene

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between retina and consciousness—processing steps that abstract information from the pattern of excitation in the retina. The shifting of this pattern due to saccadic motions and due to voluntary eye movements is filtered out. When you move your eyes or head the world stays fixed, even though the image on the retina wanders. This is one of numerous "perceptual constancies" brought about preconsciously by some abstracting circuitry in one's brain that evolved to permit one to orient oneself in the real, objective world. It evolved with the evolution of the brain, over millions of years; it is not a matter of learning by the individual. Other such perceptual constancies are the sizes of objects as they move closer or farther, the color of objects irrespective of the qualities of the illuminating light, the shapes of objects irrespective of perspective, the loudness of sounds irrespective of distance, and innumerable others. Until quite recently, it was one of the basic misconceptions of philosophers that the mind deals with "primary sense impressions" and that the individual learns to make the abstractions. Kant's claims of the "a-priori-ness" of such categories as space, time, and causality as necessary forms of perceptions almost hit the nail on the head. These categories are indeed a priori for the individual, but they did not fall from heaven; they are matters of evolutionary adaptation, designed for survival in the real world.

The cortex is the organ of ideation. Consider the ideas of "object" and of "number." We are not born with these concepts ready at hand. They develop during our first years, through a series of stages. Piaget was the first to grasp the immensely interesting fact that the cognitive human mind is not something innate but something that develops like any organ or part of the embryo. His lifelong study of the development of the concepts of space, time, motion, object, causality, and number has helped to provide a clearer understanding of the interplay of evolution and the experience of the individual, the interplay of the innate and the learned, to produce this development. Let us look briefly at the development of two of these concepts, the object concept and the number concept.

The development of the *object concept* during an infant's first two years of life is preceded by that of eye-hand coordination. Initially, the infant has the grasping reflex for anything touching the hand but it cannot grasp for something it sees. It may increase its hand waving and, by trial and error, reach and grasp something seen. But "something seen" is not yet an "object"—something that has permanence whether seen or not, whether in motion or stationary. The object concept arises in the context of structuring space in the surroundings—where structuring really means coordinating and assimilating the space of the visible, the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

audible, the tactile, and the motor worlds. In the first stage of development, this space is only that which is immediately reachable by arms, legs, or mouth. The rest of the world remains the infinite firmament. In the next stage, memory enters, the memory of an object played with a few seconds earlier. After the infant's attention has wandered, he expects to find the object in the same place and returns to it. Next, you can play hide-and-seek with him by hiding an object; he will expect it to continue to exist in its hiding place, and will look for it and find it. In the next stage the infant clearly forms mental images and is able to plan and to follow complex spatial transformation.

This is the object concept, so vital for our orientation in the world, so ancient a part of our mind. The bizarre thing is that we have to abandon it in modern physics: the category of identity, of permanence, had to be eliminated in quantum mechanics. One cannot "identify" an electron; one can never say whether an electron "seen" now is "the same" as one seen later; particles are annihilated and created out of the vacuum. This abandonment of absolutely basic concepts, "a priori" in Kant's sense, is the hallmark of modern science, as we shall see in several examples.

It is a long way from the concept of an object—and its continued existence when out of sight, hearing, and touch—to the *concept of number*. This concept has nothing to do with the ability to recite the names of numbers. It involves the ability to see the equivalence of two sets—say, a set of candies and a set of pennies—equivalence meaning that one can pair them off without having any left over. The difficulty of the task consists in disregarding (abstracting from) distracting features: whether the candies are spread out farther than the pennies, whether they are larger than the pennies, whether or not they are arranged in a line or jumbled, and so on. It takes a high degree of mental operations to do these spatial rearrangements and abstractions, and the ability to perform them (concrete mental operations) does not come until age seven to eleven. Before that stage the child does not have the concept of cardinal number, the idea of equivalence between sets of objects. The ability is not related to cultural influences; it develops with growth, entirely as an unfolding of a genetic program.

Where do these remarks about the number concepts leave the question of the *reality of the mathematical universe?* The fact that only man has the ability to elaborate this concept into a mathematical discipline, the fact that it develops relatively late in the child, the fact that it requires special processes of abstraction, mental powers undoubtedly rooted in cortical structures—are all these facts relevant to the question whether the numbers were "invented" by man or whether they constitute an independent reality to be "discovered" by man, be it in evolution or in development? Consider theorems about the totality of num-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bers. Consider, for instance, the theorem that the series of prime numbers is infinite. The ingeniously simple proof of this beautiful theorem is found in Euclid. How is such a thing possible? How can the capacity to perform a few very simple concrete mental operations permit us to discover truths extending to infinite sets? How can such "absolute" certainty be attained by a creature with a cortex evolved under selection pressures acting at prehistoric times? Hereon hinges much of the battle regarding the foundations of mathematics of the last hundred years: Cantor's attack on the paradoxical aspects of infinity; his distinction between denumerable sets and the continuum of the real numbers; Russell's and other paradoxes of set theory; Hilbert's tremendous program of "Proof Theory"; and Gödel's demonstration that the goals of this program are unattainable. The lesson of all of these powerful efforts seems to be that an understanding of the nature of mathematics cannot be attained from studies within mathematics and mathematical logic alone: we must look for it in the wider context of consciousness and language.

The cortex is the organ of *consciousness* and of *language*. Do these two necessarily go together? Are they synonymous? Certainly not synonymous; otherwise we would never be at loss for words to express our thoughts. But can we be conscious of something that would be impossible for us to verbalize?

Here the work on *lateralization* of various cortical capabilities has revolutionized our insights. Normally the two halves of the cortex are so intimately integrated that investigation is very difficult. Some years ago surgeons introduced an operation for patients with severe epilepsy. In this operation, the *corpus callosum*, a massive strand of fibers connecting the two hemispheres, is severed. On superficial study such patients very surprisingly seemed to suffer no loss at all of their normal perceptions, their motor activities, or their speech. Finer study, however, revealed a fantastic situation: visual or auditory or tactile inputs can be designed so as to reach only one of the hemispheres, and when this is done the other half literally does not know about it. This can be tested by asking the patient (or the animal) to identify—say, by touch with his right hand, controlled by one hemisphere—an object seen in the left half of the visual field, an input leading to the other hemisphere. He cannot do it, even though the verbal instruction is given to both halves of the brain. More striking, it turns out that the right half is incapable of verbalizing what it "knows," even though this knowledge is clearly present, since the right half is able to use it for solving complex mental tasks. The dichotomy goes so far that the patient may show an emotional response, say by a smile, when seeing a picture with his right half, but if asked *why*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

he smiles, his verbalizing left half can only admit ignorance. These great discoveries show that we have *two* minds under one roof, two minds normally so well integrated that their separation is inapparent: they "talk too much to each other" (via the corpus callosum), and then talk with "one voice," controlled by the left half, to the outside world.

Does the right half, the nonspeaking half, have consciousness? Yes, it certainly has a mind, in the sense that it can hear and understand speech and rationally answer questions, not by speech, but by solving problems. Whether you want to call this consciousness is a matter of terminology, and terminology in this area is not settled at present.

What is special about speech, then, in relation to the mind? For the purposes of this essay, I want to define language using four criteria which are satisfied by human language. (1) We form a large number of *symbols* (words) by a combinatorial procedure from a small number of elements: phonemes in the case of spoken language, kinemes in the case of sign language of the deaf. (2) We form *sentences*, bringing words into logical connection by a finite number of rules of grammar and syntax—an unlimited (denumerably infinite) number of sentences. (3) We use these sentences for *socialized actions*. (4) We have the inherited capability of *learning any of a very large number of languages* (five to ten thousand now current) from our elders, learning words, grammar, and syntax. The phonemes as such are largely inherited and a matter of development.

Learning in general is, of course, a much older capability than learning a language; it includes learning from others, parents especially. Horses learn from their mothers not to shy from trains and cars, and it has been shown that birds learned to pick aluminum tops off milk bottles from the one bird who invented the trick.

If we try to apply these criteria to "the language of the bees"—the well-known symbolic dances they perform in their hives to transmit to their mates the direction and distance of food sources—we see that bees do form symbols from a few elements. They do not form sentences with grammar and syntax; they do use the symbols for socialized actions. They do not learn the language; they are born with it. Thus, for purposes of this discussion, let us not call the bee's system of communication a language.

With respect to monkeys and apes, the situation is different. Some monkeys produce a considerable number of phonemes, and they do produce a number of symbolic words: several different warning cries appropriate for different situations, threatening cries, and so on. These are used socially, but are not used to construct sentences, and they are probably not learned from the parents. However, chimpanzees are capable of learning to communicate with their keepers, using a variety of nonvocal models to construct simple sentences: kinemes of American

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sign Language or colored-button recognition and handling.

Much of language has to do with memory. A fluent speaker has thousands of words stored in his long-term memory as words of *his* language and, if he knows several languages, several words stored separately for the same object. How he gains access to this memory when the word is presented is a mystery. Each word is stored with related information: its meaning, its sounding, its spelling, its grammatical category, et cetera.

Memory, learning, and retrieval of stored information can be studied with chess instead of language. Chess is much more circumscribed than language; you can measure competence in chess quite well, yet it is reasonably rich and complex. How do chess masters differ from ordinary players? Do they analyze each situation more completely, in greater depth, looking more moves ahead? Astonishingly, it turns out that they do not; in fact they explore less. Instead, they have a huge store of "chunk memory" of partial aspects of each situation. The better the chess masters, the larger the number of chunks, up to about forty thousand, like the word-memory of a highly literate person—and similar to it in the capability for quick access to each chunk, and having each chunk stored with a great deal of related information. Each real chessboard situation presented to a master is immediately seen as a set of a few chunks, like a meaningful sentence.

In addition to words, the fluent speaker stores in his memory a prodigious number of grammatical and syntactical rules of his language. As adults we find out how difficult this is when we try to learn a foreign language. Yet every child of any culture has the ability to infer the rules of any language in a relatively short time, under conditions where he is exposed to unsystematic samples, many of them fragmentary and even faulty. This accomplishment is equivalent to learning an enormously complicated theory. Yet even people with very low IQs have it. Little reinforcement is needed in this process, and it happens at an age when the child is quite incapable of comparable analytical learning.

So here is a capability of the human mind that, astounding as it is, has been very refractory to analysis. The attempts of the linguists even to describe it in terms of language universals, of transformational grammar, and so on, have yielded precious little insight. Even more frustrating have been the attempts to understand the neural network underlying it. Yet nobody doubts that the basic aspects must have a clear-cut machinery.

To get at the biological meaning of language, we would dearly like to know how and when it evolved, but here we draw an almost total blank. Is fluent language as old as the human species, now clearly documented for at least three million years? Or did it evolve only with the domes-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tication of fire, and develop around the hearth some forty thousand years ago, when there was time for leisurely talk in relative safety from predators? Opinions differ radically on the time and mode of language evolution, and data simply are not to be had.

It is suggestive, in this context, to turn to studies on the language development of the infant, again pioneered by Piaget. The earliest function of speech in the child is very clearly *not* communication, but symbolization. The first signifiers the child uses are private symbols, not even verbal symbols, but rather one object serving as a symbol for another. These lead to internalization and representation. Communication with others through words or signs comes later. At six years, more than half of the speech utterances of children in kindergarten situations are *egocentric* (that is, not serving communication; the children carry on monologues, "think aloud" their ongoing actions). Language is a symptom of thought structure, a dependent variable. As every parent knows, children find it difficult, even unnecessary, to impart explicit information. When forced, the child "reads aloud" his continuing cognition, not concerned with communication. He already knows the information. This behavior contrasts fundamentally with vocalized gestures of animals, which are inherited and which have nothing to do with internalization. Thus, human language is a unique capability, of which at most only the crudest beginnings can be discerned in his closest relatives, the higher primates. Biologically, it serves two functions: a crutch to representational and analytical thinking (a private affair) and a means of communication (a social affair). The combination of these two aspects has permitted language to become *the* vehicle of cultural progress: orderly systems of knowledge, transmitted from generation to generation, and, by translation, even across language barriers—eventually, the sciences.

Ability to learn and ability to transmit learning: these two abilities are not restricted to animals with language, but in language they have evolved their vastest expansion, and it is very likely that there has occurred in its wake a decisive and somewhat sinister feedback loop between biological and cultural evolution, running somewhat as follows:

1. The cultural evolution of language (formation of dialects) is a much faster process than any biological evolution by natural selection between rival local populations of a species.

2. Therefore conspicuous linguistic differentiation between local populations quickly outruns biologically inherited differentiation.

3. Linguistic differentiation thus permits easy recognition of conspecifics as belonging to "us" or "them," thus facilitating intergroup rivalry, internecine warfare.

4. For species on top of the food chain, that is, with no predators threatening to diminish their number, to proliferate fast is not a selective

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

advantage but, on the contrary, a disadvantage.

5. Natural (biological) selection between these groups is in favor of those best equipped linguistically, and fiercest in aggressive instincts directed against conspecifics that have a different "culture"—that is, behavior patterns and especially *cultural* behavior patterns, for instance language.

It is a fact that in many so-called primitive tribes the joy of killing individuals of the tribe in the next valley surpasses almost any other joy, and it seems at least very plausible that the high selective premium associated with this form of aggression has been responsible for the "success" of *Homo sapiens* and for the extinction of many sidelines in the evolution of the species. The near or complete extinction of many native populations in historical times probably is an example of what happened all over Eurasia and Africa for as long as "culture"—that is, transmission of learned language—has been around.

In developing the sciences, what has happened to the old concepts of object, number, time, topological space, projective space, metric space, causality? What has happened to all the concepts that together constitute our naïve view of physical reality? What has happened to this evolutionary acquisition of immense adaptive value, enabling us (as higher vertebrates) to get along in "the world," so conceived? The funny thing is that science has pulled the rug out from under this structure. *Special relativity theory* has replaced the space-time frame with an abstract one, in which a man may go on a trip and return a younger man than his twin brother—a claim that is irreconcilable with our concrete mental operations of space and time. *General relativity theory* tells us of "singularities in space," black holes with an "event horizon" from which no signals can emerge, of finite but not bounded space—concepts that we can learn to manipulate in a formal way but that our mind cannot visualize. *Quantum theory*, the worst offender, does away with object identity, trajectory of objects (electrons do not run around in orbits); it proclaims a conspiracy of nature that forces us to choose, to make either/or decisions between various aspects of reality that exclude each other in any observational act. Is this a Kierkegaardian notion, in that every observational act becomes an existential one? Have the physicists become religious thinkers?

Indeed not, since the choice is not an ethical one, not even the choice of an individual observer, but one that concerns collective observations on, say, light quanta: pass them through a contraption that permits statements about their *circular* polarization (right or left circular), or through a contraption that permits statements about their *linear* polarization (vertical or horizontal). "We" make this choice, and these choices

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

materially exclude each other, because any one quantum, once it is observed—that is, recorded by a counter—is irreversibly gone. Such is the individuality, the quantum nature, of any atomic interaction that is involved in constructing an object world. It always leaves this object world with a residue of uncertainty (Heisenberg's Principle) and limits predictions to statistical ones.

This bizarre dialectical situation goes to the heart of the concept of the reality of the physical world, so basic to the evolution of our mind. For millions of years we have been animals that know the dichotomies: actor-onlooker, I and the world, mind versus real world, a confrontation between an inner world of thoughts, volitions, and emotions and an external world.

This is the Cartesian cut into a *res cogitans* (the soul) and a *res extensa* (the body)—two distinct substances—that has been the stance of science for three hundred years and has been the blight of psychologists, whose job it is to cope with both sides and to tie them together in some fashion. Is the tree I see in front of me the same as the object, or are the two things distinct? When we think of the retinal image of the tree, the conduction and processing of this image occurring in the neural network of the retina itself, in the lateral geniculate nucleus, the striate cortex, visual cortex II and III, and so on, and finally into consciousness, we must realize that what consciousness sees is literally worlds apart from the object. On the other hand, does it make sense to take the object and its perception apart in this way? There is only one reality: the act of seeing, of seeing what our language forces us to call "an object." These are the opposing points of view of the dualist and the monist. Contingents of philosophers have straddled the barricades between them in assorted postures.

The notion of the objective physical reality of the physical world, independent of the observer, is a notion we form in earliest infancy, and we form it with the aid of mental equipment evolved over millions of years of adaptive evolution. It is a notion that has been most necessary for survival, for getting along in the cave and, even before the cave, in the trees. It is also the notion that has been most solidified, hardened, codified by the development of the classical physical sciences themselves, into the "physical law." It has been said, and it is a common belief, that physical laws describe the external world in an *objective way* and that they reduce this description to *numerical relations*. Let us look at these claims more closely, for instance at the relation $S = \frac{1}{2} gt^2$. It is indeed a relation between numbers. However, to make it a law of physics we need to know that S is a distance, t a duration, g an acceleration. The numerical relation as such does not express a physical law. The law is expressed only if we understand that the numbers are measures of a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quality of the thing measured: a spatial length represents something completely different in quality from a duration or an acceleration. In addition to the qualities of the quantities measured, we need to know where and what to measure. We need to know the class of actual situations to which the law refers. In fact, the physical law, far from hanging out totally detached from the observed object, refers very explicitly to situations actually or potentially experienced by an observer and to nothing else. This is true, let us add parenthetically, even if we make statements about the origin of the universe, the Big Bang—even though, by no stretch of the imagination, could there have been an observer around to observe it. It would be an illusion to think that physical laws describe the external world independent of the observer.

In what sense, then, is physics objective? We say it is objective in being "reproducible" for each observer, and "the same" for different observers. These two criteria are the pride of the physical sciences, and they are indeed met. Information stored in enormous handbooks of physics and chemistry and the rigid core of the textbooks of these disciplines give vivid testimony to the objectivity. One might characterize the physical sciences as those for which explicit connection to actual experience constitutes an annoying constraint from which they are trying to liberate themselves more and more. The physical law is supposed to refer to larger and larger classes of experiences. The infant's first construction of space-time frames and his notions of persistent objects and of causal connections constitute giant steps in this direction. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the physical sciences represent the actual or potential experiences and observations of individuals, in however abstracted a form, and as such are as psychic as any emotion or sensation. The blue of a summer sky and the 4,400 Å of the wavelength of its light both refer to experiential acts, differing principally in the affective components accompanying these acts and their expressions. The statement is often made that "blue" is a private sensation which cannot be identified with another person's sensation because it is subjective. The same is true for the size of this table. How do I know how large you see it? Indeed, your impression must be different from mine, since you are farther away. So we measure it with a ruler. But measurements of length—noting coincidences of marks on the ruler with edges on the table—are private acts too, comparable only to the extent that we have linguistic expressions for them.

It is the parsimony of the number of elements singled out which makes the duality of observer and observed so successful, and gives the illusion, in physics, that the object is totally distinct from the observer. This distinctness is true in the sense that we do not mention the observer when we say, for instance, that the present temperature of the black-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

body radiation left over from the Big Bang at the beginning of time is 3°K, or that a supernova exploded 10^9 years ago. However, any such statement is linguistic in the first place, and as such is meaningful only within the framework of the total scientific discourse, reflecting individual and collective experiences and acts.

My point is this: the distinction between psychic and physical is not at all a radical one, but a matter of degree. Consider eye-motor coordination when you try to hit a tennis ball. Your eye sees it coming, your brain commands the arms and legs to make appropriate motions, the eye and the proprioceptor apparatus continue to monitor and correct this output by comparing it with a mental image of what should happen—a classical feedback loop containing the conscious visual picture, surely a psychic element, as part of the interactive network. It is true that meter readings, and the like, lend themselves to quantifications more easily than mental images of an intended motion, and for that reason they are more easily communicated either in informal or in mathematical language. In principle, however, both are psychic and both are physical.

I therefore claim that the antithesis of external and internal reality is an illusion, and that in fact there is only one reality. Quantum mechanics has simply served to remind us of this fact, which seemed to get lost in the abstractions of physical science.

The item of external versus internal reality looks especially confusing when we consider more closely those situations in which the object is the consciousness of ourselves or of someone else. Say you are thirsty. In what sense is your thirst a physical quantity? Whatever thirst may be, it is something you can have more or less of. In principle, therefore, it is measurable, either by behavioral tests or by physiological correlates. While it is useful to make the practical distinction between psychic terms and nonpsychic terms, the distinction is no more basic than that between liquids and solids.

In this much too long and much too short essay I have attempted to look at the oldest problems of epistemology: what is Truth and what is Reality? I have tried to respond to the raised eyebrow, as it were, implied in my title, "Mind from Matter?" We start with a naïve question: How can mind emerge out of dead matter in the course of purely physical processes? Mind which then looks back upon itself and says, "Aha, this is how I came about." (Like Baron Münchhausen, pulling himself by his hair out of the mud.) I have avoided the language of the emergent evolution school, a school that in my opinion has not made a constructive contribution to these questions; on the contrary, it has camouflaged them behind an appealing metaphor. I have looked at the questions as a scientist, as a student of evolution in the widest sense: evolution of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Universe, evolution of Life, evolution of Mind, evolution of Culture.

The point of view of the evolutionist has the principal virtue of *forcing* us to view mind in the context of other aspects of evolution. Parallels with other forms of adaptation (organs of locomotion, of sensing, cross-modal integration in the central nervous system, and so on) become imperative. Mind, the mind of the human adult, the object of so many centuries of philosophical studies, ceases to be an absolute. It is seen to be a product of adaptation in response to selection pressures, as is everything else in biology.

The sciences have played a peculiar role. The classical natural sciences served, as it were, to solidify the feeling that the adult human mind is an absolute: this mind grasps absolute physical laws concerned with absolute matter embedded in absolute space and time. The Cartesian cut between mind and matter is the rock on which they stand.

Modern science has gone the opposite way. It has forced us to abandon absolute space and time, determinism, the absolute object. It has shown that these naïve notions must be replaced by more abstract formal schemes, that the naïve notions are applicable only in the middle dimensions of space and time and energy. As soon as we go to extreme dimensions, our intuitions—that is, our concrete mental operations—become inadequate. This is the point, exactly, where evolutionary thinking is decisively helpful: it suggests, in fact it demands, that our concrete mental operations are indeed adaptations to the mode of life in which we had to compete for survival a long, long time before science. As such we are saddled with them, just as we are with our organs of locomotion and our eyes and ears. But in science we can transcend them, as electronics transcends our sense organs.

Why, then, do the formal operations of the mind carry us so much further? Were those abilities not also matters of biological evolution? If they, too, evolved to let us get along in the cave, how can it be that they permit us to obtain deep insights into cosmology, elementary particles, molecular genetics, number theory? To this question I have no answer. Indeed, the approach I have sketched by no means resolves all puzzles, nor does it produce a grand synthesis between the universes of discourse now current in the various sciences. Least of all does it give a basis for a new setting of values in ethics, values relevant to the life of the individual or to social organization.

The feeling of absurdity that attaches to the notion "Mind from Matter" is perhaps similar to the feeling of absurdity we have learned to cope with when we permit relativity to reorganize time and space, and quantum theory to reconcile waves and corpuscles. If so, then there may yet be hope for developing a formal approach that will permit a Grand Synthesis.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Victorious Losses

SAMUEL HAZO

Too busy saying what you choose,
your words rush straight ahead
like some unsteady solo
in the key of reason.
No sharps,
no flats, nothing left to syncopation,
not a hint of dazzle.
Predictably,
the final words that end
the final lines must kiss—
like this.
Dominoes!
The world
keeps waiting for a voice to tell
it what it means while you
play dominoes.
Even your days
are dominoes.
You count your steps.
Each dawn you brush your up-teeth
down and then your down-teeth
up.
The spaced and slowly
sinking heartbeat of a deathbell
sobers every ear but yours.
Remember Ivan's words on death?
"The dead outnumber us—we all
must join that last majority—
to die is simply democratic."
Could you have uttered that
and slapped your knee and laughed?
Remember too the girl you quietly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

desired and thought you loved
but never made love to?
Facing
the possibility of pleasure
and the certainty of guilt, you
backed into the future like a thief.
At worst you're still a puritan,
still ready to retreat into a simpler
world that's always waiting to receive
the man you think you are.
At best you live by Goethe's creed
that thought begins in private,
character in public.
Alone
with dreams you can't refute
and wants you never want to want,
you turn to words until
you turn into the words you write.
Your metronome collapses, and your
lines unrhyme while you go on
committing poetry, that holy crime.

● SAMUEL HAZO is director of the International Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh. His most recent books are *Quartered, The Very Fall of the Sun,* and *Smithereened Apart.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Bereaved

JAMES HEARST

Granted, a meeting with her,
on the steps, in the hall, or a
room, granted too, an occasion,
return of a book, a business talk,
casual invitation, what occurred
seemed on the surface scarcely
worth mentioning. She made up
a smile, offhand greeting, an eddy
in the day's tide. But out of her words
welled tears, grief of eyes overflowing,
cheeks caught in the grimace of the
lonely of heart.
I told her, there is the sudden break
called death, and a long suffering
called death, and we are not free
to choose, the end is the same.
Only you can speak for your lonely bed.
You cannot depend on us, the day comes
when you make your wailing wall private,
not to be seen by family or friends,
you keep your passion to yourself,
let the wound heal slowly.

But she was not comforted.

✪ JAMES HEARST is professor emeritus of English at the University of Northern Iowa. He has published eight books of poetry.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

How to Read the New Contemporary Poem

PAUL BRESLIN

To generalize about contemporary poetry is difficult, for we live in an eclectic age without a unified period style. Nonetheless, over the last seven or eight years there has been something in the air, more extensive than a school or group style, roughly comparable to the "confessional" poetry of the 1960s in its ability to attract widespread imitation among younger poets and indiscriminate praise among critics. Usually known as "surrealism" or "the new surrealism," this idiom has existed since the early 1960s, but only at the end of the decade did it emerge as a widely shared and widely admired common style. The so-called confessional poets were having their day from 1959 to somewhere around 1968 or 1969; the surrealists have been having theirs ever since. The term "surrealism" is even less helpful here than the term "confessional" was earlier. It suggests that the unity of the current poetics derives entirely from technique, rather than from a shared set of implicit assumptions about poetry and reality. It fails to explain why Gary Snyder, who is not a surrealist at all, belongs in some respects within the definition, while such accredited surrealists as Philip Lamantia and Michael Benedikt belong outside it. The best-known poets writing in this style are W. S. Merwin, Robert Bly, James Wright, Galway Kinnell, Mark Strand, James Tate, and Charles Simic. In addition to Tate and Simic, who are still in their thirties and already well known, the younger poets of the new style include Peter Everwine, William Matthews, Gregory Orr, Richard Schramm, Greg Kuzma, and many others less advanced in their careers.

It is clear, from what people say about contemporary surrealism when they are trying to be nice, that such poetry is supposed to be terribly mysterious, profound stuff. Richard Howard says that Charles Simic's poems "come to us . . . from an enormous otherness, a distance beyond words, wrought out of remote elements of the imagination of the hinterlands." "Crunk," the pseudonymous reviewer of Robert Bly's magazine, *The Sixties*, assures us that James Wright ". . . goes long

PAUL BRESLIN is an assistant professor of English at Northwestern University. He has published criticism and poetry in the *Yale Review* and the *Georgia Review*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

distances when he starts, and gives the impression of someone obeying ancient instincts, like some animal who spends all summer with his herd, and then migrates alone, travelling all night, drinking from old buffalo wallows." Mark Strand says that "the perils of the present, the terrifying compromises we make with the moment, the whole provisional nature of being when the self is mistrusted or simply not there, are what James Tate's work is about." The new poetry, whether surrealist or not, is a poetry of mystery—or mystification.

The kind of poetry in which meaning is explicitly stated, in other words poetry that has an argument, is not very prominent in our century. The more usual approach has been to juxtapose images and symbols so that the reader must draw the implicit connections for himself. In such poetry, context is all-important: the pattern in which the parts are arranged draws out and emphasizes certain meanings while excluding others. Such poems may be mysterious, even obscure, but if they are any good at all, they contain at least the seeds of their own interpretation. One may have to read very closely and, in the case of Eliot or Pound, trace some recondite allusions, but if one does so, one finds that the apparently disjunct parts of a poem converge on some intelligible meaning. Certainly the poetry of the 1970s, though not easy, is no more difficult than that of the early twentieth-century masters. But it is difficult in a less rewarding way. Its coherence has little to do with any context or relationship established within a particular poem, but comes instead from a shared set of rhetorical and ideological formulas that can be rearranged to make any number of more or less interchangeable poems. It has a stock rhetoric of portentousness, and all too often its mysteries are only the trivial mystifications of cant and code. To crack the code is to realize that the poetry comes, not from a vast otherness, but from a perfectly intelligible literary ideology.

If one looks for the kind of coherence that is generated by the arrangement of a particular poem, rather than a coherence existing prior to the poem, one is likely to find the new poetry rough going indeed. Here, for instance, is W. S. Merwin's poem "The Night of the Shirts," from *The Carrier of Ladders* (1970):

> Oh pile of white shirts who is coming
> to breathe in your shapes to carry your numbers
> to appear
> what hearts
> are moving toward their garments here
> their days
> what troubles beating between arms
>
> you look upward through
> each other saying nothing has happened

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and it has gone away and is sleeping
having told the same story
and we exist from within
eyes of the gods

you lie on your backs
and the wounds are not made
the blood has not heard
the boat has not turned to stone
and the dark wires to the bulb
are full of the voices of the unborn

And here is James Atlas, an intelligent poet and critic, trying to make sense of the poem:

> What is the purpose of asking all these questions? Is the line "to appear" essential, or just a repetition of the previous line? What motivates the metonymous "hearts"? Where is "here"? What is "the same story"? What are "the wounds," what "the blood"? Where does "the boat" enter in, to what does it refer? What suggests that it should have "turned to stone"? The poem has no meaning, not even a style; it sounds like a poor translation.

Although I cannot answer all of Atlas's questions, I can answer most of them. But I can do so only by reading "The Night of the Shirts" in the context of other poems like it, as an example of a shared rhetoric.

The first question that needs to be answered is: Where is "here"? It is a mistake to imagine the poet in a literal situation—at the laundry, for instance, picking up his shirts and looking at all the other shirts awaiting their owners' return. "Here" is an interior place, and the poem refers to shirts in the mind's eye, not shirts on the hanger. We are inside the psyche, in some mysterious place where recurring images like "the boat" appear and undergo strange transformations—as, for example, into stone. This interior space is magical, sacred, and so it is that "we exist from within / eyes of the gods." These gods are the sacred presences within the self, and what truly exists in us comes from them; we are most truly alive when we live in the inner self. The poem is about the descent from the quotidian world into the depths of the psyche. The "it" that has gone away is the "nothing" of the previous line; the nothing that has happened disappears and becomes less than nothing. In a world where nothing happens we are left with "the same story," the descent into the self, as the only possible event.

But Merwin's poetry, unlike that of the more optimistic Bly, Wright, and Simic, is a poetry of tantalizing, failed transcendence. If we could really get far enough down in the psyche, the blood would hear and the boat would turn to stone; but the journey fails, and the poet is doomed to repeat it again and again, as indeed he has done. The shirts (apostro-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

phized throughout the poem) represent the external life, the socialized self. They lie on their backs, but cannot fall deeply enough asleep, are not filled with the flesh and blood of the inner, unconscious life; the external world fails to become the dream. Merwin's poem becomes more intelligible, though not necessarily better, when one understands its convention of poetry as a voyage inward, a quest for union with the unconscious. That convention is the single most important rule in the new poetics, and from it all the smaller rules are generated.

Often poems in the new style offer fairly explicit portraits of the inner depths, and the composite iconography that emerges is rather consistent. Journeys inward and downward do not end in a dense tangle of repressed memories, forbidden desires, and multiple associations, as Freudian theory might lead us to expect, but in the encounter with a mysterious presence, sacred and impersonal, inhabiting an interior space. Consider, for example, James Wright's well-known short poem, "The Jewel":

> There is this cave
> In the air behind my body
> That nobody is going to touch:
> A cloister, a silence
> Closing around a blossom of fire.
> When I stand upright in the wind,
> My bones turn to dark emeralds.

Clearly, this poem describes a sacred space within the self. The vocabulary insists on enclosure and interiority, sharp demarcation from the external world. The word "cloister," of course, points to a religious content, but equally decisive is the language of synesthesia and paradox, which invites and then frustrates visualization and leaves us at last with the contemplation of a mystery. One cannot envision a "silence / Closing around a blossom of fire." The "blossom of fire," like the fire and the rose in T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding," is an image of mystical reconciliation between living form and inchoate energy. The title, "The Jewel," applies to the sacred mental space but also to the emerald bones of the last line. This interior sacredness extends to the body as well as to the mind, transforming even the bones. Conspicuously absent from Wright's poem is any evocation of a struggle to arrive at or establish this sacred space, or any hint of its relation to the ordinary reality outside it. The imagery is completely divorced from any profane content, or any reference to time and change. In this it parts company with "Little Gidding," and its complete isolation from the external life—guarded, as it were, by the chip-on-the-shoulder third line—gives the poem a disturbingly defensive, solipsistic quality. The transcendence does not overcome any resistance, and therefore seems unreal.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Other portraits of the inner mystery have a similar ambience. Here, for example, is a passage from Charles Simic's "Knife":

> We go down
> An inner staircase.
> We walk under the earth.
> The knife lights the way.
>
> Through bones of animals,
> Water, beard of a wild boar—
> We go through stones, embers,
> We are after a scent.

As with Wright, we are once again inside a cave. The stones, bones, and embers suggest that it was once inhabited by primitive man; by going "through" the "bones of animals," we reenter a state more primitive still, early in our evolution. The revelations of the "inner staircase" are impersonal and archaeological, connecting the psyche to some mysterious ancient presence that is tangible but vague, like a "scent."

Much the same atmosphere informs Robert Bly's poem "Turning Inward at Last":

> The dying bull is bleeding on the mountain!
> But inside the mountain, untouched
> By the blood,
> There are antlers, bits of oak bark,
> Fire, herbs are thrown down.
>
> When the smoke touches the roof of the cave,
> The green leaves burst into flame,
> The air of night changes to dark water,
> The mountains alter and become the sea.

Again, the poet imagines the psyche as a cave in which man has built his fires; and again this place is sacred, impersonal, and primitive. In this case it is magical as well, changing air to water and mountains to sea.

These poems have nothing to do with the Freudian unconscious, but a great deal to do with the collective theogonic unconscious proposed by Jung, who broke with Freud over the question of whether the unconscious was the abode of banished desires or the wellspring of religious revelation. Even the dream that led Jung to postulate a collective unconscious employs a rhetoric startlingly similar to that of the poetry quoted above. In that dream, recounted in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung descends from the second story of a house to the ground floor and then into the basement. As he proceeds downward, the furnishings become progressively older. Beneath the basement lies the oldest and deepest region of all:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I looked more closely at the floor. It was of stone slabs, and in one of these I discovered a ring. When I pulled it, the stone slab lifted, and again I saw a stairway of narrow stone steps leading down into the depths. These, too, I descended, and entered a low cave cut into the rock. Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like remains of a primitive culture. I discovered two human skulls, obviously very old and half disintegrated. Then I woke up.

For Jung, the psyche is like the house in the dream, and its deepest recesses are the cave beneath the basement. The unconscious of Freud, which contains repressed wishes and memories of early traumatic events, is but an upper story; beneath it lies a collective, impersonal unconscious, which preserves, under the modern rational personality, an "archaic" self. In the collective unconscious, religion, magic, and myth continue to live for us as they do for primitive peoples, through the production of archetypal images in dreams, fantasies, and works of art.

The status of a symbol is not the same for Jung as it is for Freud, and the difference is important in understanding the essentially Jungian poetry of the current style. Freud insisted that even a dream, the most nearly direct expression of the unconscious, was "a thought like any other," which had been repressed. The strangeness of dreams comes not from the unconscious idea—which, once understood, is perfectly intelligible—but from the elaborate disguises the unconscious idea must assume in order to escape the censorship of the ego. The images of the manifest dream are usually quite remote from the latent meaning. In order to arrive at the meaning, one must work backward through a chain of substitutions; a word or image in the manifest dream will suggest still others. Gradually some common theme emerges in all these associations, and this common theme is the clue to unconscious meaning. Freud, in a metaphor he used more than once, compared the manifest dream to the facade of an Italian church, which reveals little or nothing of the internal design. Jung, in his essay "Dream Analysis in Its Practical Application," alludes explicitly to this metaphor in contradicting Freud:

Perhaps we may call the dream a façade, but we must remember that the fronts of most houses by no means trick or deceive us, but on the contrary, follow the plan of the building and often betray its inner arrangement. The "manifest" dream-picture is the dream itself, and contains the "latent" meaning.

Proceeding on his assumption that the dream is an autonomous structure rather than an oblique commentary on the experience of the dreamer, Jung constructed a set of fixed categories, or archetypes, to explain the meaning of symbols in dream, myth, and art. Such a system pays little attention to the historical context in which those symbols were produced, but treats them as representatives of universal categories. In

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Freudian interpretation, we recover part of our self-knowledge, part of our response to the external world, which we had disowned and feared; in Jungian interpretation, we must give ourselves over to the unconscious as to a god whose scripture is the dream. Jung, to his credit, was aware of the solipsistic tendency of his own psychology, and warned that a process of "individuation," connecting the collective unconscious to one's own particular situation, was necessary to prevent the unconscious from engulfing the entire self. But this part of his theory seems to have got lost in popularization and has little counterpart in the new poetry.

Although Robert Bly has made explicit use of Jungian archetypes in his poetry and in his essays on poetry, the case is rarely so simple as that. Indeed, there is no evidence that all or even most of the poets in question are avowed Jungians. But the reader will already have remarked the curious self-referentiality of symbols in the poetry I have quoted. When Bly says, "The dying bull is bleeding on the mountain," we don't know where the mountain is or why it has a dying bull on it, and we never do find out. It seems that by merely uttering the words "bull," "bleeding," and "mountain," the poet expects to awaken powerful resonances in us. Certain words, as Marvin Bell and Robert Pinsky have noticed, come up in this poetry over and over again, carrying a heavy burden of portentousness in each instance. Editing the lists of Bell and Pinsky, and adding a few candidates of my own, I come up with the following lexicon: wings, jewels, stones, silence, breath, snow, blood, eats, water, light, bones, roots, glass, absence, sleep, and darkness. Pinsky calls this vocabulary a "literary diction," and he is right, but the issue goes further than the calcification of conventions into clichés. The nouns on this list have roughly the same status in discourse as Jungian archetypes: their significance is innate and prior to context. The point is not only the predictability of the diction, but also the way in which the key words are used, as if they came to the individual poem already charged with significance.

The diction, if not quite reducible to formula, is predictable enough. If space allowed, I could present scores of examples containing two or more words from my list. Here is one from Robert Bly's "Unrest":

> now the darkness is falling
> In which we sleep and awake—a darkness in which
> Thieves shudder, and the insane have a hunger for snow,
> In which bankers dream of being buried by black stones. . . .

Here is the beginning of "She Who Was Gone," an example obtained by a "Sortes Merwinianae" in *The Moving Target*:

> Passage of lights without hands
> Passage of hands without lights
> This water between

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I take in my arms

My love whose names I cannot say
Not knowing them and having a tongue
Of dust

My love with light flowing on her like tears. . . .

Even this poem, chosen at random, does not fail us: here are "water" and "light," and the fifth through seventh lines are a sort of cadential trill on the concept of silence. Consider also these lines from Charles Simic's poem "Sleep":

My blood runs
Past dark inner cities on fire.
I climb into deep wells,
Rock bottoms and bone bottoms. . . .

Here are two passages, the first from Mark Strand's "The Stone" and the second from Gregory Orr's "A Final Aubade," which might almost be taken for parts of the same poem:

The stone lives on.
The followers of the man with the glass face
walk around it
with their glass legs
and their glass arms. (Strand)

Behind it [the "deeper darkness"] a river flows over stones
shaped like hands. The dead with their glass legs
walk by the river. The river
seems to pass through them. (Orr)

Or there is Galway Kinnell, in *The Book of Nightmares*, asking us

to touch
the almost imaginary bones
under the face, to hear under the laughter
the wind crying across the black stones.

But enough. A reader familiar with contemporary poetry will have encountered many passages like these.

Reading poetry that depends so much on a revealed symbolism, rather than a symbolism created by the arrangement of the poem or the exploration of a recognizable subject, one begins to wonder what consequences, if any, this interior revelation may have for life as a whole. To judge from the nature of the key words, we are being asked to dismiss the quotidian world and take refuge in the collective unconscious. Some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of these words—darkness, silence, absence—tell us how inscrutable, how inaccessible to sight or hearing the inner mystery is. The more concrete nouns rarely combine to form an exact image of something in the world, but remain, in Pinsky's phrase, the names of "blank, simple substances." The diction is impersonal, animistic, primitive: all things finally come down to bone and blood, water and stone. Above these elemental realities, personality, history, and culture weave their intellectualizing and fraudulent patterns, unregarded by the enlightened poet. What motive lies behind this extreme antihumanism and this extreme preoccupation with the unconscious?

If we can withdraw our rapt gaze from the vast otherness and the old buffalo wallows, and look under our own collective nose, the motive becomes fairly obvious. The new poetry was born in the early 1960s, at the same time as the white middle-class popular radicalism usually known as the New Left. The political theory most important to that movement—the work of Herbert Marcuse, Paul Goodman, N. O. Brown, and R. D. Laing—was *psycho*-political in emphasis. These thinkers, and those who made use of them, believed that in the apparently free society of a Western democracy, political oppression occurs primarily through psychological conditioning rather than coercive force. Through socialization we are led to accept a false self, intimidated and acquiescent, while repressing our own legitimate desires. Brown and Marcuse argued that repression was not, as Freud thought, the inevitable price of life within civilization, but an unnecessary burden imposed on the individual by an unjust society and a fear-driven culture. The recovery of the repressed through the exploration of one's own psyche was inextricably bound up with any real political change.

Certainly we should be grateful to the New Left for its tireless opposition to the war in Vietnam, but in dealing with issues beyond the war it was less than successful. In retrospect much of its political thinking was mere posturing; too often, its rhetoric confused revolution with therapy. Motives are rarely pure, and for many 1960s radicals the movement offered a welcome escape from cultural guilt. The sentimental reasoning behind this self-exculpation went something like this: White Americans and western Europeans, from whom I am descended, have imposed their will on other peoples in terrible ways. What they have done to others is analogous to what they have done to their own instincts, justifying such oppression and repression by appeals to reason and law. It is the ego that has done this; away with it, therefore, and with reason and law, which are its instruments. If I side with the instincts and the unconscious, I declass myself, and my guilt falls away. In such a view, all culture, all social and political institutions, and all attempts to govern human affairs according to reason are nothing but shams, designed to aid

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the despotic ego in its work of repression. This caricature of New Left thinking has survived into the 1970s.

The confessional poetry that preceded the new poetry also made use of New Left psycho-politics, and sometimes did so sentimentally. But in the best work of Robert Lowell, Sylvia Plath, and Allen Ginsberg, the psyche remains in the world. When the poetry is psycho-political, it includes both parts of that hyphenated term. Its psychology is essentially Freudian—that is to say, contextual, secular, and historical. And in the heyday of the New Left this was the poetry that seemed representative. It was around the time when the New Left began to collapse that confessional poetry went out of fashion and the new poetry came in. I do not believe that this was a coincidence. The ascendancy of the new poetry represents a giving up on the outside world, a retreat from psycho-politics into a solipsistic religion of the unconscious.

This attempt to recover innocence and faith at any cost, even the abolition of social reality and the conscious self, explains the ubiquity of the most popular key word in the new poetry: "stone." Galway Kinnell, early in *The Book of Nightmares*, writes:

> I sit a moment
> by the fire, in the rain, speak
> a few words into its warmth—
> *stone saint smooth stone. . . .*

Simic's devotions to Saint Stone include a book title, *Somewhere Among Us a Stone Is Taking Notes*, and a poem called "Stone," beginning "Go inside a stone / That would be my way. . . . I am happy to be a stone." Orr has a sequence titled "The Adventures of the Stone"; Wright begins a poem with the line, "Hiding in the church of an abandoned stone . . ."; Merwin uses the word dozens of times per volume; I have already quoted from Mark Strand's "The Stone." And there are large outcroppings elsewhere, even among poets only tangentially related to the style—like Tom Clark, who wants to be "open to the stones / really open to them." A young poet, James Richardson, has recently trumped everybody with a long poem in sixty-odd sections called "The Encyclopedia of the Stones: A Pastoral," speculating on the mental and social life of stones.

Perhaps the pastoral charm of stones is that they are the furthest things from the human—the least conscious, the simplest, the most innocent. They have never discriminated against blacks or destroyed Vietnamese villages, never deceived themselves with a clever argument or capitulated to social convention. In their modest way, stones are perfect. But there is a positive, mystical implication behind the obsession with stones, as well as a merely negative desire to be rid of cultural guilt.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For this meaning we may turn again to Jung, who found, in the turbulence of his youth, that it was

> strangely reassuring and calming to sit on my stone. Somehow it would free me of all my doubts. Whenever I thought that I was the stone, the conflict ceased. "The stone has no uncertainties, no urge to communicate, and is eternally the same for thousands of years," I would think, "while I am only a passing phenomenon which bursts into all kinds of emotions, like a flame that flares up quickly and then goes out." I was but the sum of my emotions, and the Other in me was the timeless, imperishable stone.

Galway Kinnell expresses much the same idea in an interview:

> If you could go even deeper, you'd not be a person, you'd be an animal; and if you went deeper still, you'd be a blade of grass, eventually a stone. If a stone could speak, your poem would be its words.

Stone, then, is the sacred Other within—the collective, impersonal unconscious. It is our immortal part, but its immortality, like that of the lovers on the Grecian urn, is purchased at the cost of being dead: if you are not alive in the first place, you cannot die, and so become "immortal." If Keats's urn is a "cold pastoral," then the stone is the pastoral of absolute zero.

But perhaps one can go further still. In their darker moods, Merwin, Strand, Tate, and Kinnell suspect that the authentic self is not even a stone but an absence; indeed, Tate calls one of his books *Absences*. Mark Strand begins his poem "Keeping Things Whole" by saying:

> In a field
> I am the absence of field.
> This is always the case.
> Wherever I am,
> I am what is missing.

And yet the concept of absence takes on a religious meaning; it means purity, abandonment of the false strivings of the ego. As James Tate puts it,

> I who have no home have no destination either,
> one bone against the other,
> I carve what I carve
> to be rid of myself by morning
> by deep dreams disintegrated.

Merwin, in a tentative statement of faith sharply hedged by the opening "Maybe," shows us how nearly interchangeable with "presence" this religious absence can become:

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Maybe he does not even have to exist
to exist in departures
then the first darkness falls
even there a shining is flowing from all the stones
though the eye is not yet made that can see it
saying Blessèd
are ye

Here the absence of the divinity is hypostatized into a more rarefied form of presence; the "departures" somehow become a guarantee of the existence.

It is not surprising that the attempt to graft this dismal psychology onto the psycho-political thinking of the 1960s should produce a pretty dismal sort of political poem. Even a relatively successful piece like James Wright's poem on Eisenhower and Franco suffers from a pervasive sentimentality:

Eisenhower's Visit to Franco, 1959

. . . *we die of cold, and not of darkness.*—Unamuno

The American hero must triumph over
The forces of darkness.
He has flown through the very light of heaven
And come down in the slow dusk
Of Spain.

Franco stands in a shining circle of police.
His arms open in welcome.
He promises all dark things
Will be hunted down.

State police yawn in the prisons.
Antonio Machado follows the moon
Down a road of white dust,
To a cave of silent children
Under the Pyrenees.
Wine darkens in stone jars in villages.
Wine sleeps in the mouths of old men, it is a
dark red color.

Smiles glitter in Madrid.
Eisenhower has touched hands with Franco, embracing
In a glare of photographers.
Clean new bombers from America muffle their engines
And glide down now.
Their wings shine in the searchlights
Of bare fields,
In Spain.

The poem is done almost entirely in short, simple sentences, thus

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

assuring us that the speaker is not merely a clever manipulator of language, but a sincere votary of darkness and silence. The rhetoric simply inverts the moral symbolism of cowboy movies: the bad guys are wearing the light images; the good guys are wearing the dark. The world is divided into sinister "heroes" like Eisenhower and Franco (I'm no fan of Eisenhower's, but there *is* a difference) and the heroes' victims, such as the poor in the villages of Spain, the "cave of silent children / Under the Pyrenees," and "old men" who have the "dark red color" of wine "sleeping" in their mouths. The wine is stored—where else?—in *stone* jars. The defenseless children and the enfeebled old men, the poor and the weak, are in touch with darkness, silence, and the unconscious—just like poets, just like Antonio Machado, who is invoked as their witness. The poem tacitly assumes the helplessness of the poor and the poet's identification with them. Both assumptions are sentimental and, taken together, self-exculpating: the poor are helpless victims, like poets; I'm a poet, so don't blame me. In Robert Bly's "Romans Angry About the Inner World," political struggle is similarly reduced to psychic melodrama. Life is a mental war between "the executives," who know nothing of the lives of children or of floating "joyfully on the dark places," and the representatives of "the other world," which

> is like a thorn
> In the ear of a tiny beast!
> The fingers of the executives are too thick
> To pull it out!
> It is like a jagged stone
> Flying toward them out of the darkness.

Here, once more, is the stone, come to take its notes and judge the quick and the dead.

The new poetry, to sum up, is a desperate attempt to cure the discontents of civilization by radical surgery. By removing the part of the psyche that has been tainted with the arrogance, guilt, and skepticism of the culture we live in, we may regain our innocence and our capacity for belief. But can the psyche survive such an operation, even if it were possible? And would civilization really be any better for it? The offending part is nothing less than the entire ego, which is by definition the part of the psyche that has dealings with the outer world. Without the mediation of the ego, the unconscious has no access to people and things outside the self, except, in the Jungian version, through the shadow-community of the archetypes. One can say of the currently fashionable poetics what Philip Rieff, in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, said of Jungian psychology: "Inside his private myth, the individual can safely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

claim his discharge of catholic obligations. In the ritual of dream and fantasy he gains membership in the invisible church of common meanings. A socially and politically inconsequential symbolic universe is thus constituted."

But even Jung knew better than the Jungian poets when he wrote: "If anyone should set out to replace his conscious outlook by the dictates of the unconscious . . . he would only succeed in repressing the former, and it would reappear as an unconscious compensation. The unconscious would thus have changed its face and completely reversed its position. It would have become timidly reasonable, in striking contrast to its former tone." The unconscious has become so timidly reasonable that it consents to communicate in a thoroughly predictable literary diction.

What can be done to overcome this pervasive solipsistic ideology? For one thing, critics of contemporary poetry will have to stop talking the same cant as the poets—a circular demand, for the critic of contemporary poetry is, more often than not, a poet as well. The priestly incantations of Richard Howard, et al., must give way to a dry-eyed, attentive examination of new poetry. One must begin with an accurate description of the poems one is trying to evaluate, and take it from there. One does not want to discourage poetry about the mysterious and wonderful, but a genuinely mysterious subject should be regarded as a special challenge to the poet's gifts of intellect, feeling, and language, not as a convenient excuse for trotting out one's *mysterioso* vocabulary. And a truly mysterious and wonderful poem, in turn, poses exactly the same kind of challenge to the critic.

Some of the poets mired in the common style have unquestioned talent. Merwin has an exquisite ear; Kinnell an intermittent gift for daring metaphor and the explosive line; Wright, when he is not worshipping stones and bones, is often a sympathetic observer of other people, or of the midwestern landscape. It would be mean spirited not to acknowledge that they have given us some very good poetry in spite of themselves. It is pointless to speculate on what they might have done had they not followed the zeitgeist down a blind alley. The point is that we need not rush into the alley after them. It ought to be clear by this time that the unconscious is not a god, but only a part of ourselves, and one that is knowable only indirectly, through its influence on our perception of people, places, and things. It does not need a cloister or a silence that nobody is going to touch.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

TEACHING

Hannah Arendt

PETER STERN AND JEAN YARBROUGH

What made Hannah Arendt a great teacher? She seemed to violate many of the canons that make for effective teaching. She had no special pedagogical methods and no set doctrines. She made no attempt to attract students through polemics or flattery, and she did not try to entertain them. In fact, the format of her lectures probably sounds quite dull: for the first hour or so she would read from a fully written set of notes; then, for the remaining forty minutes, she would answer questions.

This format—reading a prepared lecture and opening the class to questions for a prescribed period of time—can, in the wrong hands, discourage learning. A dense, closely argued paper on complicated, unfamiliar material can be difficult for students to follow, and Arendt's lectures were no exception. What was unusual was that she recognized this and made her lectures available to students after class ended, to reread and take notes from. Setting aside a large block of time for questions at the end of the lecture also presents hazards. For one thing, there is an inevitable loss of spontaneity: questions that seemed appropriate during the lecture may, by the time it is over, strike the student as not worth the trouble. Or this procedure can give rise to the opposite problem: students may ask questions simply because the time is available and they want to hear themselves talk. Even when the questions are germane, handling them one after the other, with no thematic link, can be difficult for the lecturer. Each answer must be specific enough to clear up a particular student's problem while remaining sufficiently general to hold the class's attention.

This rather old-fashioned method of teaching—formal, rigorous, and full of potential pitfalls—Hannah Arendt mastered and transformed. She did so not by any special technique, but through the sheer brilliance and originality of her ideas and the mysterious force of her personality. Although we tend to separate not only passion from reason but a person from his ideas, Hannah Arendt presented the spectacle of their union. So her lectures, despite their being read, were lively, exciting, and sometimes overwhelming in the power and insight they expressed.

In trying to explain what made Hannah Arendt a great teacher, we must, then, say something about her as a person. This, however, is no easy task. She seemed to be made up of many contradictory traits, each of which was so greatly magnified by her enormous intensity that it was impossible to conceive of them all existing in the same person. She was warm and friendly to her students, but could suddenly end a conversation with an abrupt but benign "So. . . ." Inside the classroom and out, she welcomed debate—a "free-for-all," she liked to call it, smiling, with a foreigner's delight at being able to use American slang in this unexpected way.

Yet she could become impatient. "But, my dear . . ." she would reply imperiously, and that was that. She was generous. Although there was something slightly chaotic, even eccentric, about her generosity, the combination never failed to charm. Mary McCarthy,

PETER STERN is a lecturer in political science at the New School for Social Research. He has contributed to several journals, including *Interpretation* and *Political Theory*, and is currently writing a book on Karl Marx.

JEAN YARBROUGH, assistant professor of political science at the University of Connecticut, Groton, specializes in political philosophy and American political thought. She has published articles in *Publius* and *Polity*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her close friend, captured this quality perfectly in her eulogy address: "She would press on a visitor assorted nuts, chocolates, candied ginger, tea, coffee, Campari, whiskey, cigarettes, cake, crackers, fruit, cheese, almost all at once, regardless of conventional sequence or, often, of the time of day." Hannah Arendt was also a worldly person. She had been around and prided herself on knowing the ropes. She was famous, knew everyone, had many friends, and, in her writings, unfashionably celebrated the virtues of worldliness. Nevertheless, she often seemed uncomfortable, awkward, and somehow removed from the world. The reason for this awkwardness, which for a long time seemed so incongruous given her tremendous energy and forcefulness, eventually became clear. Contrary to our first, and indeed lasting, impression of Hannah Arendt as a tough-minded, strong-willed, and entirely fearless person, we slowly came to see that she was also shy, modest, and strangely vulnerable, never quite convinced she deserved all the attention she received.

We studied with Hannah Arendt at the New School for Social Research, where, since 1967, she had held the post of University Professor of Political Philosophy. Her classes were always packed, although not everyone attending took them for credit. Some were official auditors, students who had completed their course work and were writing their dissertations; others were former students from other universities who were now in New York and were eager to reestablish old ties. Usually there were also a few outsiders, unconnected with either the New School or Miss Arendt, who, impressed by her writings, were curious to hear her in person. But the majority were regularly enrolled students taking the course for credit, most of them in the philosophy department. The fact that a fair number came from other fields, especially political science, reflected the interdisciplinary nature of Hannah Arendt's thought.

Certain rituals surrounded her classes. About ten minutes before the lecture was scheduled to begin, the room would start to fill up. By the time Miss Arendt actually began lecturing, all the chairs were taken (room size being designated on the basis of *official* enrollments), and students who came late would have to sit on the floor or raid nearby classrooms for more chairs. On the table in the front of the room were her props: a lectern, a glass, and a pitcher of water (from which she would pour a glass when she wanted to pause for emphasis, when a new thought suddenly occurred to her, or when she was just plain thirsty). Usually she came into the room escorted by her teaching assistant and sometimes, especially during her last several semesters, by her student secretary as well. As she entered, she seemed curiously apprehensive, as if deeply troubled, and the presence of her assistants seemed necessary to reassure her. Walking slowly to the lectern, still preoccupied, she would suddenly stop, turn to the class, and nod, smile, or wave to students she recognized—her usual cheerfulness returning. She then continued to the front of the room and, reaching the lectern, would remove the manuscript of her lecture from its folder, remind us where we had stopped the week before, and then begin reading from her notes.

One of the qualities that made Hannah Arendt a great teacher was her ability not only to make ideas come alive and seem important (all good teachers possess this gift), but, going beyond this, to handle them in such a way that they evoked a vivid, tangible sense of reality—of a specific, concrete situation and man's confrontation with it—so that the ideas she discussed became one with the realities they described. What she analyzed conceptually conjured up a world of experiences we recognized even when they were not our own. In her hands, ideas were not simply steps in an argument, or abstractions divorced from experience, but the very essence of experience distilled into the language of conceptual thought.

This achievement stemmed in part from the combination of an immense literary gift with a powerful philosophic mind—always a rare blend of talents. Literary sensibility is usually concerned with capturing meaning through imagery and narrative, according to a vision of the beautiful; while philosophy, by way of logical argument, aims at what is true. It was Hannah Arendt's genius to combine these two modes. Uniting logical rigor with the use of metaphor, example, and a clear sense of the shape of a story, she helped us to grasp the central concerns of philosophy and the concrete contexts out of which these

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

arose. Part of her success as a teacher, then, lay in her "gift of thinking poetically," an expression she herself used to describe Walter Benjamin's mode of thought.

Hannah Arendt's uncanny way of handling ideas so that they evoked a dramatic sense of reality also sprang from her conviction that ideas grow out of our everyday experience and they are its conceptualization, the way in which thought—as opposed to, say, poetry, or painting—attempts to discover meaning. For her, understanding an idea required discovering the concrete experiences out of which it arose and to which it referred. These experiences, while remaining ever present possibilities, usually included a historical dimension. They first occurred in the past and were noticed by thoughtful men who tried to understand and explain them. In later times, these explanations, if compelling, may become part of the general storehouse of ideas that we take for granted as simple common sense. This subtle process of transformation from theoretical discovery to common sense—everyday knowledge, broadly speaking—leads to two results. On the one hand, experience becomes more abstract and less natural, since to an ever greater degree it is shaped by previous interpretations. On the other hand, to the extent that these interpretations preserve important experiences that in later times are ignored, or no longer clearly understood, they help orient us in the midst of confusion when we seem to have lost our way. In either case, whether emphasis falls on the present or on the past, understanding ideas demands tracing them back to their roots in experience.

Thus, for example, Hannah Arendt attempted to pin down what authority means—a central concept in political philosophy that has gradually fallen into disfavor—by analyzing contemporary and past experiences where its use seems most plausible and by reexamining what philosophers, both ancient and modern, meant by it. Authority, she argued, signifies the voluntary acceptance of rules that are more than advice and less than commands. It necessarily implies obedience, yet—and this is the crucial point—obedience that is not coerced but is willingly accepted. In the political realm, which was the focus of her concern, authority manifests itself in those institutions where legitimacy is sustained without recourse to instruments of force or violence. In the United States, the Supreme Court is the outstanding example of this phenomenon. As Alexander Hamilton put it in *Federalist* No. 78, the Court "has neither the power of the purse or the power of the sword."

However important a role the concept of authority plays in politics and political theory, several factors have helped make its meaning increasingly problematic: the liberal insistence upon absolute freedom, the conservative adherence to obedience as such, and the tendency of political philosophers to derive their standards of authority from nonpolitical realms of fabrication (the artisan fashions his product according to a pre-given model) and of the family (the male household head rules paternally without consent). To restore the integrity of authority, Hannah Arendt returned to the past, showing how Greek political experience and thought obscured the true nature of authority and how, by contrast, the Roman and American experiences illuminated it. In this complex examination, going from present-day politics to the political situation of the past, and from ideas to experience and from experience back to the realm of ideas, she vividly brought to life the significance of a much-disputed notion, the way it has changed, and why.

Her last lecture course on the will formed part of her final series of philosophical investigations aimed at elucidating man's mental faculties: thinking, willing, and judging—what she chose to call the "Life of the Mind." There Hannah Arendt revealed another quality, one closely connected with "the gift of thinking poetically," that made her a great teacher. This was her talent for finding the perfect sentence, the perfect saying and passage—those that were almost epigrammatic, containing, in the fewest possible words, the core of a philosopher's meaning, and then unraveling their significance. Hannah Arendt carefully collected these sayings, treating them as if they were cryptic utterances of a divine oracle, rich in meaning and embodying profound clues and lessons that indicated, if properly interpreted, the right way to think and act. They guided her reflections on every kind of issue, and she used them in various ways. Sometimes they served as illustrations, other times as steps in the proof of an argu-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment, much as we use the multiplication table when we do math. In her writing, they often inspired and served as the connecting thread for an entire essay or a section of one. Thus her paper "Truth and Politics" analyzes the complex relation of the political realm to truth telling by exploring the old saying, "Let justice be done though the world perish." Her famous essay on Bertolt Brecht examines the political role of the poet in terms of the Roman adage, "*Quod licet Iovi non licet bovi*" ("What is permitted to Jove is not permitted to an ox"). And her acceptance speech for the Lessing Prize was concentrated on Lessing's concept of humanity in the light of his own statement, "Let each man say what he deems truth, and let truth itself be commended unto God."

Of course it was not simply Hannah Arendt's finding relevant passages or sayings that made her classes so exciting, but her analyses of them. In her discussions, she accomplished several tasks at once. She explained what the thinker meant in a particular passage, and showed how it related to his thought as a whole. But to help us understand the larger implications of the passage, she frequently went beyond the philosopher in question, contrasting his view with the opinions of other philosophers and finally with her own. Her point was not to refute but to present the greatest variety of perspectives that could be brought to bear on an issue. Not that she believed that all these positions, taken together, added up to the truth, or that they were all equally valid. On the contrary, she seemed convinced that no final answers were likely, but attempts to shed light on the perennial philosophical questions remained important nonetheless. They demanded, she told us, evoking the spirit of Kant, the highest kind of thinking, that which went beyond the limits of knowledge.

Hannah Arendt liked to use the image of Penelope's weaving to capture what was for her one of the most striking aspects of this kind of thinking: that it never reaches its goal, and so must return to its starting point and begin again. These starting points are either our own pre-philosophic experiences or the reflections of philosophers on such experiences. Both were important for her, but in the classroom the philosophic sources predominated. She was at home with the great works of philosophy, reading and teaching them over and over with undiminished enthusiasm, convinced that they still had important things to tell us; she did not believe that these writings had been superseded or had become outdated by the mere passage of time. To her the notion of philosophical progress—that we understand the fundamental questions of human life better today than they were understood in the past—was a myth, and a dangerous one at that. It bred an unhealthy neglect of the past and an unjustified confidence in the future. Having seen through the dangerous illusions engendered by belief in philosophical progress, Hannah Arendt succeeded in accomplishing the first essential task of the philosophical scholar: establishing a living relation with the old philosophers.

However, it was not only because she refused to be lulled by the false hopes the idea of progress inspires that her reading of the great philosophic texts was suffused with new life. With her teachers, Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, she held that the tradition had broken down, so that it was no longer possible to transmit the teachings of the past intact and to submit passively to their authority. What this meant for her she told us in her own commemorative essay on Heidegger, "Heidegger at Eighty." Describing his effect on the post–World War I generation of German students, she wrote:

> . . . thinking has come alive again; the cultural treasures of the past, believed to be dead, are being made to speak, in the course of which it turns out that they propose things altogether different from the familiar worn out trivialities they had been presumed to say.

Seen in this light, the interpretation of old texts becomes both a sobering and a creative experience. At the same time that we can now genuinely learn from them, we are also inspired by them to think for ourselves.

Hannah Arendt's own interpretations were dazzling exercises, drawing out from a passage, sometimes from even a phrase, an unexpected wealth of meaning. From the *Gorgias*, she discussed Socrates' statement, "It is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong," and suggested this was based on Plato's view that thinking is a silent dialogue with oneself

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

where the self splits in two. But for the two interlocutors to trust each other in the give-and-take of their joint search for the truth, there must be mutual respect, the essential precondition for which is that neither acts unjustly. Because Plato believed that thinking is man's highest activity, it follows that this mutual respect, which requires that both partners be just, is the most important consideration—more important than being admired by others, even more important than self-preservation—especially if either of these involves acting unjustly. Thus, according to Hannah Arendt, Socrates argues that it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong because committing injustice corrupts the soul and destroys the ability to philosophize. On the other hand, Arendt wisely pointed out that this Socratic argument against acting unjustly would only convince someone who already wanted to be a philosopher. Its appeal, therefore, would be strictly limited.

In discussing Epictetus's statement, "You will be harmed only if you think you are harmed. No one can harm you without your consent," she made clear the fateful consequences of the Stoic doctrine of the will: that men can be considered absolutely free when they are in worldly bondage and, conversely, that they can be regarded as enslaved when they are politically free. Hannah Arendt showed us that this strange conclusion is not just a peculiarity of Stoicism, but comes about whenever subjectivity is celebrated without giving worldly concerns and responsibilities the philosophical recognition they deserve. To her way of thinking, Epictetus's statement has the very opposite meaning from the one he intended; rather than affirming man's freedom from the world, it stands as a constant warning against the all too human desire to want to escape from it.

Taking Cicero's saying, "I prefer before heaven to go astray with Plato rather than hold the true views of his opponents," she showed how, from a worldly point of view, a genuine sense of humanity might take precedence over even the love of truth. A cultivated mind, Arendt explained—developing Cicero's thought—eschews absolutes and extremes that endanger prudent judgment and the limited horizons men need in order to be at home in the world. In her discussion, she emphasized Cicero's essential sanity and common sense; at the same time, however, she also made us aware of the incompleteness of this view.

In her interpretation of a particular text, in her treatment of a philosophical problem, and in her overall manner as a teacher, Hannah Arendt succeeded in the difficult art of saying something definite—taking a stand, so to speak—and yet preserving an atmosphere of openness. This is a rather unusual achievement. Although everyone celebrates the virtues of open-mindedness, especially in philosophy where the example of Socratic ignorance stands as a permanent warning against the dangers of becoming dogmatic, few teachers succeed in practicing it. And this is readily understandable, all high-sounding appeals to tolerance notwithstanding, for a teacher generally knows more about his field than his students.

Hannah Arendt held strong views, defended them vigorously, and never liked being wrong. When challenged, she could become impatient and testy. During the question period following her lecture, disagreement often became sharp, and we occasionally sensed there was a point beyond which it was useless to argue. Yet a spirit of openness prevailed, in part because of her and in part in spite of her.

Ultimately this openness was the result of Hannah Arendt's essential honesty and courage. She never failed to discuss all the alternatives, presenting them with such passion and clarity that they could seldom be entirely dismissed. Moreover, we could never forget that, according to her own understanding of philosophy, the kind of questions she chose to discuss precluded giving final answers. After Socrates, she found her favorite examples of open-mindedness among the Greek historians and poets: Homer, Herodotus, and Thucydides; even in war they knew how to praise the virtues of the Greeks or Athenians, as well as their enemies.

As Hannah Arendt's last course on the will brought out her extraordinary interpretive gifts, so too did it highlight this open-mindedness, which preserved the genuine complexity of a difficult problem. During the semester, she sympathetically examined various theories of the will, slowly and carefully developing her own position and yet all the while keeping before us the central theme of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

her inquiry: the question of how there can be such a thing as the will at all. For the very notion of the will seems to contradict all we know of the internal world, governed as it is by desire on the one hand and intellect on the other. And the status of the will is made still more problematic by the difficulty we have in pinning down unambiguously those moments when the will is at work. Yet the fatalist argument that denies the existence of an independent will, and argues instead that all our actions are determined, makes judgment and responsibility meaningless. Hannah Arendt pointed her own way out of these dilemmas, but she stated the problems so forcefully that no answer, not even her own, seemed entirely convincing. It was a testimony to her teaching and her extraordinary mind that she allowed this uncertainty to reflect back on her own position.

If, then, there is a criticism to be made of Hannah Arendt's teaching, it is not that she simply read her lectures verbatim or that she was dogmatic. The problem was rather that her interpretations were sometimes so idiosyncratic, so noticeably and even obviously departing from the text, that it was difficult to take them seriously as textual interpretations. Ironically, this was the other side of her interpretive genius—her ability to relate, in surprising new ways, the general and the particular, the familiar and the obscure. As we became better acquainted with her own point of view, we saw clearly enough what, perhaps, should not be surprising: her explanation of a particular passage seemed much closer to what she herself thought about an issue than it did to what the text actually said. What was curious was that her own ideas were always so fresh and illuminating that we wondered why she did not say they were her own instead of, in effect, attributing them to others. For example, she discussed Augustine's theory of the will but removed it almost entirely from its religious context, endowing it with a political relevance Augustine never intended. She brilliantly explained Kant's theory of the enlarged mentality in the *Critique of Judgment*, but then used it to argue, albeit cautiously and with reservations, that Kant intended it as part of his political as well as his aesthetic philosophy. Or she analyzed at great length the Founding Fathers' concept of happiness, which they seldom explicitly discussed, arguing that they meant *public* happiness, the joy that comes from participating together in public affairs. In so doing, she minimized their emphasis on privacy and divorced their view of happiness from the natural-rights doctrine, despite the explicit statement to the contrary in the Declaration of Independence.

For the graduate student this procedure has obvious drawbacks. Less familiar with the texts, the unsuspecting young scholar who uses these rich but idiosyncratic interpretations as a guide to a philosopher's thought can easily be misled. But as he advances, this defect is usually remedied. And the method—if indeed it is a method—has its unexpected rewards. Hannah Arendt's interpretations, original and provocative, shocked us out of our complacency and forced us to consider anew what we thought we understood. It happened that no matter how novel, even outrageous, her analysis appeared to us at first, we discovered after much reflection that she was never entirely wrong, that even if the philosopher in question had not explicitly developed an idea in the direction she suggested, her use of it was not simply arbitrary. She had uncovered an aspect of an issue that had been overlooked and deserved further study. The special virtue of her interpretations, then, was that they always cast fresh light on a problem, either by approaching it from a different perspective or by emphasizing elements of it that more conventional scholars had neglected. Nevertheless, this was a procedure her students could rarely imitate, since it depended so much on Arendt's own intuitive genius. Thus, as far as interpretive method was concerned, we were left to ourselves to discover the best way to approach the text.

There is, however, another explanation, one we have already mentioned in a different context, for Hannah Arendt's taking liberties with the texts. This strategy stemmed from her conviction that because the tradition had broken down, we could freely appropriate the great works of the past. Indeed, this is the only way the past can be preserved. If we do not use the past in new ways to think creatively about the future, it will simply die of neglect, having been ignored and forgotten. This, she thought, would be the worst calamity; we would lose the depth and stability that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are necessary to sustain the present and guide the future. Although Hannah Arendt celebrated the human capacity for novelty, she was no destroyer. On the contrary, she wished to preserve all that was worthwhile in the past so that it might spark the desire to create greatness anew.

Paradoxically, then, Hannah Arendt's liberties with the texts grew out of her deep love of the philosophers who nourished her and for whose chances of survival she so greatly feared. In these precarious times, when genuine thought is corroded by the pedantry of experts as well as by the fear, contempt, and indifference of the masses, the interpreter's responsibility is enormous. He must explain the thoughts of the wise men of old—a difficult enough task in itself—and in such a way that the future is not stifled by excessive veneration for the past, or the past destroyed by the boredom of empty repetition, breeding impatience for the new. Hannah Arendt fully recognized this problem. When she departed from the letter of the text, her departures were never frivolous; they were informed by a profound sense of intellectual crisis and the need to foster a culture worthy of being remembered.

II

A graduate student soon learns that a great teacher is more than someone who gives memorable lectures. For if a teacher remains aloof or inaccessible to students, his lectures, no matter how brilliant and polished, eventually become somewhat tedious. Rather than being a means of sparking intellectual curiosity and debate, they become virtuoso performances, and the teacher is transformed into a star, primarily concerned with dazzling his audience and attracting a circle of admirers. Whether a student actually learns something, and develops an abiding passion for the subject, becomes largely irrelevant. Of course Hannah Arendt was a celebrity—a scholar of international repute, surrounded by a special aura—yet in the classroom she remained first and foremost a teacher, dedicated to introducing students to the world of thought.

She demonstrated her concern for her students in ways that may sound rather pedestrian, but that were actually quite helpful and none too common. First of all, she was accessible. Despite enormous demands on her time, getting to talk to her was never a problem. She regularly held office hours after class, and would stay as long as there were students waiting to see her. Before class, we could usually catch her in her office or in the hall, and even if there was nothing particular to discuss, she would always stop and inquire, "So—how's it going?" On special occasions, such as passing an oral exam or a dissertation defense, she would treat us to dinner at one of the nearby Italian restaurants.

She was also uncommonly efficient. Letters of recommendation usually went out within a week; dissertation chapters were read in two weeks. If something was pressing—say, a fellowship deadline suddenly closing in—one could call her at home. And she was always accommodating when it came to scheduling tedious chores like an oral exam or a dissertation defense. Almost every graduate student knows, either by firsthand experience or by word of mouth, how irksome the handling of these routine matters can be when professors are not so considerate.

Finally, and perhaps most important, Hannah Arendt was encouraging. Although she did not gush, she was not afraid to compliment. She expected her students to work hard, and when she was pleased with their efforts she told not only them but her colleagues and other students as well. In reading student papers, she was never begrudging or petty; if she had criticisms, they were constructive and to the point. Here too, however, her comments could be quite idiosyncratic. She had her pet dislikes, and it was best to stay clear of them. We learned the hard way, for example, that she could not abide anything having to do with Freud. If his name was mentioned in connection with writing a paper, she would sit up, fidget, and become a bit short. Then a mischievous smile would cross her face as she quoted Karl Kraus: "Psychoanalysis is that disease of which it considers itself the cure."

Even after studying with her for several years, we found it difficult not to be nervous before seeing her. There was a certain intimidating formidableness about her, a combination of her great intelligence, experience, and learning. Moreover, she was not a calm, even-tempered sort of person who could put a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

student at ease. On the contrary, what was so odd was that, though forceful, she was also high-strung, uneasy, and quite unpredictable. In fact, we had to find a way to put her at ease—no easy task, especially when we were already jittery, worrying about her reaction to term papers or dissertation proposals. But after we got to know her better, she seemed to become more relaxed (as did we), and we usually found her warm, witty, and generous. Whenever we visited her in her office, she would smile, offer us a seat, and then eagerly ask about the progress of our work or our thoughts on current political events. She was an excellent storyteller, and a good, if somewhat disconcerting, listener. While a student was talking, she would hunch forward and stare straight at him, eyes intent, her forefinger curled slightly, moving back and forth against her upper lip like a metronome measuring the rhythm of her thought as it absorbed, then weighed, what he had to say. Though she listened carefully, she certainly did not mind interrupting if some thought suddenly occurred to her. What was striking in these meetings was the expressiveness of her face, which reflected her quick changes of mood; in rapid succession she might be humorous, grave, accommodating, expansive, brusque.

At the end of the semester, Hannah Arendt always invited the students in her seminar to her home. Sitting in her living room, we would spend the first hour or so in a last free-for-all—tying up loose ends and arguing with her about the issues she had raised in the course. As soon as the official discussion had ended, platters of finger sandwiches stuffed with ham, roast beef, and tongue suddenly appeared, followed by trays of deviled eggs, relishes, and cheese. Across the hall in the dining room, which housed her enormous library, a bar was set up. Little groups formed, and she scurried from one to the other, joining briefly in the conversations, then leaving to return with still another platter of food, seemingly convinced that no matter how much we had eaten it was not enough.

These gatherings brought out two of her most memorable eccentricities: she always insisted that the men tend the bar and the women serve the food, and that the men's coats go to the far bedroom while the women's hung in the front closet (where, to our surprise, she had hung a giant Kafka poster on the door). No one was ever offended by this rather old-fashioned division of labor, nor by the oddness of her banishing the coats of one sex to the other end of her apartment. In fact, it helps explain the special affection we all felt for her. For while she was at once a powerful and commanding figure, grappling in profound and startling ways with the perennial themes of philosophy, sure of herself, with the courage to say what she thought no matter how unpopular, she was also a bundle of small quirks that betrayed how strangely ill-suited she was to deal with the more routine aspects of life. Like her parties, she was a charming, wonderful blend of the conventional, the unconventional, and the old-fashioned.

III

Although officially a member of the philosophy department and although her final book, *The Life of the Mind*, was to be a work of straight philosophy, Hannah Arendt was primarily known as a political philosopher, and rightly so. Her earlier works dealt directly with political themes, and her chief intellectual aim, spelled out in her most theoretical book, *The Human Condition*, was explicitly devoted to politics. What she attempted there was nothing less than a total reevaluation of the meaning and significance of the political realm.

Now, while the goal of political philosophy—the search for the essential character of political life and the best political order—sounds respectable enough, the field is nevertheless eyed with suspicion by most political scientists. Examining the raw world of politics from the rarefied heights of philosophical speculation, asking such questions as what is justice, what is freedom, what is authority, political philosophy is open to two different dangers, which political scientists are quick to point out. On the one hand, it may become so abstract as to lose all connection with the realities of political life as we commonly know it; on the other hand, it may, under the benign guise of philosophical inquiry, of disinterested search for truth, degenerate into mere ideology, subtle special pleading for a particular political position. In other words, it runs the risk of becoming irrelevant—or of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

becoming too relevant, sheer propaganda.

Yet even when the philosophical approach to the study of politics steers clear of these temptations, political scientists have objected to it for three reasons. First, they argue that the study of politics must be rooted in science, not philosophy, because only science is truly objective—that is, value free. Second, political philosophy is no longer necessary because social science itself tells us what politics is all about—who gets what, when, where, and how. Finally, we no longer have to concern ourselves with abstract questions such as "What is justice?" since its meaning is now deemed to be clear: justice is equality, or freedom in equality.

In the past, the study of political philosophy suffered not only from these objections made by scientifically minded political scientists but also from the mechanical way it was taught by political theorists themselves. Students seldom read original philosophical sources and, if they did, were assigned only snippets, badly excerpted, in dull, gray, heavy anthologies, with an inadequate introduction to each selection. But in either case, rather than seriously exploring the questions these philosophers raised, the teacher presented the class with a brief synopsis of the main ideas of ten or fifteen "great thinkers" that, by the end of the semester, had become an endless catalog of meaningless arguments to be memorized for the final exam. The distinctive character of each thinker was entirely lost. Further, the political philosophers were almost always studied from a narrowly historicist perspective. It was taken for granted that present political ideas were unquestionably superior to past positions; thus the views of older philosophers were criticized or dismissed simply because they did not anticipate, or agree with, contemporary views. By method and example, these teachers suggested that the wise men of old no longer had anything important to teach us. Without really intending it, they had reduced political philosophy to a lifeless history of ideas.

Hannah Arendt was part of a disparate group that reacted against the deadweight of these assumptions and against the fashionable criticisms of political philosophy put forth by modern social science in general, and by behavioral political science in particular. She did so not by directly criticizing the behavioralists—she seldom attacked head-on the sterile assumptions underlying much of their research—but by force of example; that is, by doing political philosophy. In this way, its worth could be judged by criteria social scientists themselves agreed on: results. One could read Arendt's work and see if she had anything new or important to say about the great political issues of our time—revolution, totalitarianism, the welfare state—or about the perennial problems of politics: freedom, authority, law, civil disobedience, and the like, the understanding of which decisively colors, whether we recognize it or not, our opinions concerning the more immediate issues of the day. This, she believed, is one of the reasons why political philosophy is so important and deserves continued study. It sheds fresh light on issues and opinions we tend otherwise to take for granted, by exposing and examining their unacknowledged presuppositions. Moreover, political philosophy proceeds on the assumption that the fundamental political questions have not been definitively answered and concludes, unlike scientific social science, that the centrality of these questions must be acknowledged and addressed. For it insists that ultimately these questions cannot be methodologically excluded, and that, moreover, social science itself unconsciously embodies a partisan political preference and a particular philosophical standpoint.

Aware that the fundamental questions of politics were still open, and shocked by the horrors of totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt set herself the enormous task of reexamining and clarifying the nature of the political realm, and the ways in which it had been depicted by earlier philosophers. What is unique and startling in her work is her attempt to provide a defense of politics against its critics, beginning with Plato and continuing through the nineteenth century and up to the present day. Not that she was unaware of the limits of politics, for she was quite aware of them. Yet she still believed that the typical critique of politics misses the mark because it judges the political realm by inappropriate standards, thus obscuring the profound possibilities for fulfillment that political life holds out to both the individual and the community.

Hannah Arendt's principal point, first

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hinted at in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and later fully developed in *The Human Condition*, ran like a red thread through all her courses. Politics, she believed, is not simply or even primarily the domain that holds the monopoly of force, or the sphere that determines who gets what. Rather, it is the arena of excellence and responsibility where, by acting together, men can become truly free. It transcends the domains of interest and power in the usual sense by providing citizens with the opportunity of achieving a greatness and nobility that may be revered and remembered forever. Thus, for her, politics established the context for tradition and authority as well as culture and judgment in the widest sense. In developing this view, she was inspired by those relatively brief moments in history when politics achieved its purest expression: classical Greece, republican Rome, and America during its founding. During these crucial moments, men recognized the importance of the political realm and chose to take direct responsibility for it. With great insight and passion, Arendt explained her position and, in so doing, reassessed the traditional distinctions between public and private, labor and work, power and violence, freedom and authority. The simple question guiding her investigation into these complex matters was always: How do these phenomena relate to politics? Politics was her touchstone. It illuminated all aspects of society, even those usually regarded as being independent of politics, or at least politically neutral.

Because of the uniqueness of her interpretation, Hannah Arendt has been attacked from every political corner. To radicals and liberals, she was a conservative in the tradition of Aristotle and Edmund Burke. To conservatives, her critique of the status quo seemed grounded in the radical politics of Rousseau or Marx. In fact, she was not a radical, a liberal, or a conservative because none of these positions recognizes the validity of her controlling insight, the primacy of the political realm. Although she did argue that the preservation of republican government depends upon promoting greater political participation, she was not a radical because she believed that the social question is not amenable to a political solution. While she held that certain institutions, such as the press, and certain rights, such as speech and association, must be free from governmental interference, she was not simply a liberal because she opposed liberalism's emphasis on private freedom. And finally, although she remained sensitive to the need for tradition to act as a bulwark against the uncertainties of the future, she was not a conservative in the usual sense because she believed that traditional categories tend to obscure what is genuinely new, making us complacent, unable to face creatively the fresh challenges that inevitably arise. If, then, she was not a radical, liberal, or conservative, what label can we ascribe to her? The answer is—none; hence, for her, each issue must be judged on its merits and from diverse perspectives, independent of party program and platform.

In eschewing a doctrinaire position, and by opening up new horizons for thought, Hannah Arendt taught us, by her example, to think for ourselves. This included, of course, the freedom to disagree with her, however testy she might become if we did. That was a difficult lesson to learn, and perhaps it is never fully mastered. For the sensitive student, in the course of his studies, discovers that the philosophers are far greater thinkers than he. Thus he is caught on the horns of a dilemma. Either he is overwhelmed by a thinker's brilliance and submits to his authority, or, convinced that thinking for oneself and expressing one's own opinions is the true point of education, he glibly or too quickly criticizes the philosophers of old. As a teacher, Hannah Arendt pointed to a sane middle way. She taught us to respect the great tradition of philosophy even as it appeared to be crumbling under the combined weight of its many antagonists; at the same time, she helped give us the courage to come to our own conclusions.

IV

Not all great teachers are also important writers. Hannah Arendt was both, and we are fortunate that we can reread her books to recall, rethink, and reexamine what she had to say. Since she was also a prolific writer, there is an ample body of work from which to draw.

Hannah Arendt was fond of saying that man's humanity lay in the recognition that who one is—a person's unique character and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

manner—can transcend one's gifts and achievements. Maintaining this perspective guaranteed that the creator would not be overwhelmed by his creations, thus preserving what, in her essay on Jaspers, Arendt called *humanitas:* the sense that each individual represents an aspect of humanity with a dignity of his own. It seemed to us that she occasionally drew too sharp a distinction between the individual and his work, since the work—be it a book, a painting, a building, a piece of sculpture—often reveals something of the unique quality of its creator. Hannah Arendt's own writings are certainly a case in point; her distinct voice is always unmistakably present. Still, it was in her teaching more than in her writing that her distinctive character seemed most manifest. There her gaiety, wit, and passion, her testy impatience, her love of debate, her shrewd common sense, and her joy in communicating her knowledge to others became most clearly visible. This combination of qualities, along with her brilliance and learning, is what made her such a remarkable and inspiring teacher. Her books, including her posthumous work, *The Life of the Mind*, can never fully compensate us for our loss. We shall always feel that, although she died suddenly and painlessly at the age of sixty-nine after a long and brilliant career, she died much too soon.

Old Age

RALPH ROBIN

As thinness of an oily smear by light's
Diffraction causes the colors which grace
This street, the thinning of the appetites
Adds color to the lifelong commonplace.

The pleasure of one tangerine with cheese
More subtly glows than credit-card dessert,
And fifty words reread more truly please
Than fifty books concocted to divert.

The variation when the rays diffract
Prefigures variation of old modes,
And pastel colors grace the ancient act
That roared white-hot down too familiar roads.

And though the spectral thinning-out appalls,
Enjoy the spectrum till the axe blade falls.

RALPH ROBIN's poetry and short stories have appeared in the *New Republic*, *Encounter* and many other journals. He is the author of a book of poems entitled *Cities of Speech*.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Livery Stable

RICHARD DANKLEFF

He leaves the harness room where he sews gear,
cooks and sleeps. Along the rows of stalls
he's tended more than twenty years,
he breathes the sharp high-in-the-nostril smell
of horse. The water tank's inside the door.
Beyond, sun bakes the pole corral.
In here it's cool as a church. Secure,
he and the horses like their mornings dull
and slow, as now, all but a stamping Arab mare.
His old chestnut, eyes closed, rubs on the wall.
His mules look cynical. The bay team stirs,
nickers a hymn to curry-combs. The foal,
as usual loose, comes through the box-stall bars
to snuffle his pockets. Softly cursing them all
he turns to the new day's ritual chores,
puts four at a time in the hot corral to roll,
forks dusty hay in the mangers, from the floor
wheelbarrows manure outside to the pile.
Manure fumes, like an incense, reinforce
the drifting dust from the dry swale
and prairie grasses. Wiping his face, he swears
this life suits him so goddamned well
that most nights in his prayers
he just says thank you. . . . Past the mules,
like a graceful acolyte appears
a glorious buckskin gelding.

RICHARD DANKLEFF is at work on a collection of poems set in nineteenth-century Kansas and Oklahoma. His poems have appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Massachusetts Review*, *College English* and other journals. He teaches part-time at Oregon State University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Common and Uncommon Readers

Literature in the University

DAN JACOBSON

"The trouble is we just don't *read* like ordinary people!" a colleague exclaimed despondently to me, soon after I had joined the English department of which she had long been a member. The remark stuck in my mind. The more I thought about it, the more interesting it became. So many questions seemed to flow from it. For instance: How do "ordinary people" read? Or even: Do "ordinary people" read in the sense she meant? Do they read *Paradise Lost, The Faerie Queene, A Tale of a Tub,* or *The Old Curiosity Shop?* Or, to widen the scope of the questions still further, would English literature, as a continuing enterprise that depends quite as much upon readers of old works as it does on writers of new works—would English literature simply cease to exist if all university English departments were closed down by a benevolent dictator? If teachers and students were not paid to read books like those mentioned above (and all students in Great Britain, where I am writing this, are paid directly by the state), would many of them do so?

Obviously I have strong suspicions about what the answers to these questions are, or I wouldn't have asked them. In this connection I have often thought it would be instructive to find out what proportion of the entire annual sales of the classics of English literature are made in September and October, when the schools and colleges reopen and students get their reading lists. Such an investigation might suggest that many of our most famous and supposedly most honored classics wouldn't even be kept in print if it were not for the safe (and state-subsidized) markets provided for their publishers. Some teachers of English literature may choose to find comfort in the thought that whatever a dictator might think of the utility or desirability of their subject, he would hesitate a long time before throwing out of their jobs thousands of innocent ancillary workers in the paper, printing, and publishing industries. If the survival of English literature depends upon the universities, therefore, it should be safe. Its continuance seems assured. Too many people have invested too much in it for its future to be jeopardized.

But what about those "ordinary people"—ordinary readers, unpaid readers, *real* readers—in whose existence my colleague obstinately wished to believe? That she should be haunted by the presence (or absence) of these phantom readers shows how strong the feeling remains, even in someone like herself, that there is ultimately something incongruous and unsatisfactory about the very idea of a *department* of English literature, about corralling off the reading of novels and poems as one more academic specialty among the rest. It is incongruous with what has always been one of the central ambitions of those who have actually created the literature: that of reaching, amusing, and instructing as many "ordinary people" as possible, consonant with the complexity or simplicity of what the writer wishes to express. It is also to some extent incongruous with what the teachers and scholars may recall to be the very reason that made them follow the discipline of English literature in the first place: their pleasure, their wholly unprofessional pleasure, in reading poems and stories.

✪ DAN JACOBSON is a novelist born in South Africa but long resident in England, whose books include *The Price of Diamonds, The Beginners,* and *The Rape of Tamar.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To point to this incongruity is not, of course, to suggest that literature is any the less deserving of academic study, discussion, classification, and clarification than is any other human activity. No, the problem appears to be rather the ever-increasing dependence of literature on the processes of academic study; indeed, its virtual identification with them. Hence the despondency of people like my colleague. If they could only be sure that ordinary people—not in large numbers, necessarily, merely in sufficient numbers—were still reading, still discovering the great works of the past for themselves, still immersing themselves in *The Pilgrim's Progress* or *The Prelude* for the love of what they found there, then their own academic work would seem to them so much more worthwhile. Then they would be undismayed by the thought of the unread, make-work critical journals piling up like coral in every academic library in the world, and the graduate students multiplying like flies in summer. But that assurance is lacking. Instead, their situation sometimes seems comparable to one in which life itself (flies, coral, and all) is shriveling away to that which biologists are studying at any given moment in their laboratories, or one in which the only movements taking place in society at large are those permitted and described by sociologists.

To give just one example of what I have in mind: it could be argued that the self-renewing continuity with past generations of readers, upon which living literatures have depended, is a much more paradoxical affair than my own remarks of a moment ago implied. What is forgotten, what is *not* read is quite as important for the maintenance of that continuity as what remains current in one way or another. This not only because we would all soon be overwhelmed without a remorseless and rapid attrition among the masterpieces that each generation hails as its own. The matter goes much further. Writers and readers alike have to be free to forget and rediscover the past as their own needs dictate, as they become aware of apparently new areas or kinds of consciousness within themselves that seem to demand new forms of expression. It is then that aspects of the past which have been neglected or have gone out of fashion come to be understood afresh, learned from, even awarded a kind of retrospective legitimacy. The very notion of "renewal" or "revolution" in literature makes no sense without such a constant coming and going, such a lapsing away and reemergence of authors and periods.

But for professional readers, professional scholars, professional explicators of texts, the canon is not elastic in this way. It cannot be permitted to be so. It is obviously the duty of an academic institution to oppose itself to such irresponsible and unpredictable fluctuations in taste or opinion. If literature has in the past emerged as a result of them—then so much the worse for literature. Besides, the implications with regard to jobs, career structures, departmental needs, special collections in libraries, and so on, are all too plain. (Is it unpardonably coarse to mention such considerations? I think not.) Better by far that all writers who have been incorporated into the curriculum for one reason or another should remain there forever—neither alive nor dead, but in a limbo somewhere between, zombie-fashion.

No wonder, then, that among some contemporary writers one can detect signs of a phenomenon quite unknown, I think, to the original practitioners of voodoo: a form of voluntary or self-imposed zombie-ism. By this I mean poets and novelists who have willingly forgone any appeal to that insubstantial and hopelessly unreliable audience of ordinary people out there, in favor of a niche in a contemporary literature course—any contemporary literature course. Being academics themselves, they know just how valuable tenure is in an uncertain world; they also know that many of their colleagues are less interested in what might enable ordinary people better to enjoy life or endure it than in what will provide suitable material for seminars and lengthy articles. They know that such colleagues, unlike other readers, are boredom-proof (what could be more unprofessional or unscientific than to let go of a topic because it is *boring!*); that they welcome, indeed eagerly seek out, difficulty, which they see as a value in itself rather than as an element in the work that has to be justified by artistic necessity; that they have the leisure to follow up, with excitement, every literary allusion thrown across their path.

So we have writers *in* universities producing literature *for* universities. It seems logical

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

enough. But there is one further step that has to be taken, and many have taken it unhesitatingly. The literature they produce has to be *about* universities. Then the circle is complete. Nirvana. The world transcended.

Fortunately the world is a large and boisterous place. Like cheerfulness, it keeps breaking in. Moreover, Nirvana turns out to have fifth columnists within its walls—thousands of them, like the colleague I have quoted—who constantly try to remind themselves that their subject is *not* hermetic and self-regarding and that what makes it impure or disorderly from a strictly academic point of view is not its deficiency or drawback, but its justification. They even go so far as to believe that the greatest achievements of literary scholarship or the most audacious elaborations of literary theory have to be judged—no, not by ordinary readers, but in relation to the recollection, however tenuous it may be, of the ordinary reader and his needs.

Well, it is clear enough where my sympathies lie. My cards are on the table, and a rather grubby or vulgar pack some may choose to find them. Perhaps at this stage I should explain that, having spent about twenty years as a self-employed writer, chiefly of novels and short stories, with only occasional forays into the United States on visiting creative-writing fellowships, I have recently become a member of the English department of one of the colleges of London University, with the same teaching obligations as everyone else in that department. (No instruction in creative writing; the subject is unknown on this side of the Atlantic.) Hence, no doubt, some of my particular preoccupations. However, one doesn't need to have made a journey similar to mine to discover that morale among those in the field of literature is pretty low at the moment. All one has to do is to talk to people. Or read the journals. Or remember the kinds of claims that the most eminent university critics of literature made for themselves and their subject, as a matter of course, twenty or thirty years ago.

But this widespread loss of self-confidence has not slowed down investment (in every sense of the word) in the subject, or the strengthening and elaboration of its institutional structures. On the contrary, it has actually speeded them up. What I have been trying to put forward here, in fact, are some reasons for what seems to be the perverse reciprocity between dwinding morale in the profession, on the one hand, and an apparently limitless growth in its responsibilities, on the other.

Conceivably the situation might well be changed by one of those flowerings or outbursts of genius that have occurred several times in literary history. Then some of our present disproportions would be righted, temporarily at least. When that will take place, or if it will take place, or, should it do so, whether its manifestations will resemble at all the literary movements we have known in the past, is anybody's guess. In the meantime there are people in the profession who meet their own despondencies by a head-on counterattack. Some of them insist, with unabated force, on the humanizing, morally elevating effect of the study of English literature—a study that, in their eyes, is almost invariably betrayed by those who actually pursue it. (This would not seem to affect its pure platonic potentiality, however.) Others respond not merely by showing indifference toward the idea of the common reader, but by positively wishing to do away with him, once and for all. Their regret is that even now the subject is not enough of a true arcanum, penetrable only by initiates. The rites or modes of initiation they are prepared to offer vary widely: structuralist, Marxist, cabalistic. . . .

Within these general conditions, the pleasures and pains of teaching literature doubtless remain what they always have been. The texts and students continue to offer recurring surprises—many of them pleasant, some of them less so. At this point the temptation to fall into anecdotage and random opinion-proffering is almost irresistible. Everyone who has taught a literature course of almost any kind will know what I mean. How interesting it is (to me) that my opinion of the artistic merits of *The Scarlet Letter* or *Wuthering Heights* is so much lower now than it used to be, and my opinion of the merits of *Emma* higher. Or that a particularly illuminating remark about Hardy's poems ("Most of the best ones are about looking back on looking forward . . .") should have been made by a girl whose eyelids were so heavily daubed with silver paint I almost expected them to jingle like coins every time she blinked.

Enough. The temptation must be resisted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But one surprise I have had in the last two years does seem worth mentioning, although in some respects it is hardly less personal than the kind of thing mentioned above. Any writer who becomes a teacher would naturally like to believe that his struggles with his own work have given him an understanding of some of the internal and external conditions of authorship—from the pressures of certain psychic and technical problems, say, to those of the marketplace—that can be of help in his discussions of a text with a class. He might hope, too, that in the course of his own work he actually accumulates, rather than disperses, a charge of energy or excitement which can sometimes communicate itself to his students. All that said, however, the difference between writing one's own fiction or poetry and talking about the novels and poems of others remains immeasurable. Indeed, unbridgeable. The medium in which one is immersed seems, in each case, wholly different from the other. The one activity is sociable, the other solitary; the one is noisy, the other silent; the one is evanescent, the other at least aims for permanence, even if it might never attain it; responsibilities in the one are defined publicly, in the other solely by the self.

Yet the two activities have one common factor that I would never have expected to find before I began teaching in earnest. It has been the source not only of the greatest surprise offered by the job, but also of the strongest sense of familiarity within it. In the lecture hall or seminar room, it seems, one is still inescapably involved in *making up stories.* These stories are very different in kind from one's own fictions, and from those that the poet or novelist under discussion has himself written. But they are stories nevertheless, narrations composed jointly by teachers and students alike. Ideally, each of them has a beginning and an end, which must somehow be made to appear more than just conventional in character; like all other narratives, it must manage to reconcile self-sufficiency with continuity, the most private apprehensions with shared understandings. Every story one tells about a text, no matter how closely it may stick to verbal particularities, or how freely it may range across aspects of social history, is an attempt to find an intellectually and aesthetically satisfying resolution to that conundrum. In other words, every time a novel or poem is discussed, its context has to be established anew. How is that done? Through its content! There is no other way.

Not all stories work out, of course. Many, if not most of them, are abortive. One's collaborators have never bothered to become acquainted with the issues at stake. They don't understand the plot. They don't believe it matters, anyway. They look at their fingernails or the points of their shoes, expecting you to tell them all they need to know, from beginning to end, as they assume teachers do in all other subjects. That's what you are paid for. *They* are paid to learn as much as they can of what you tell them, and regurgitate it at examination time. Often enough, your own energies are not up to the task; you fall back inertly on stories told in the past by others or by yourself. A bell rings and the corridors are filled with trampling feet.

But then, it is precisely the possibility of failure of this kind that gives the task whatever value it has. It is precisely the ever-fluctuating relationships between contents and contexts—or, to put it in starker terms, the survival of meanings and the death of meanings—that *are* the subject.

Which brings me back, circuitously enough, to those "ordinary people" with whom I began. Ultimately they have always provided both the content and context of every work of literature ever written. If they have stopped reading the classics for no end but their own pleasure, what is that but the death of one kind of meaning? In the absence of such readers, it remains to be seen if other meanings can really be kept alive.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Black Heavies

JERVIS ANDERSON

The name Jack Johnson sounds exactly right for the man who made it famous, for the sort of man we hear and read that he was: tall, black, powerfully built, controversial, saucy, irreverent, and a brilliantly gifted boxer of former days. His grin, which was frequent—and sometimes defiant—revealed a tooth of gold; and he loved to hear it described as his "golden smile." Only he knew the many things he was smiling at or smiling with. But to the ordinary onlooker his smile suggested at least two things: that he was oblivious to any unfavorable opinion the world might hold about him, and that he was enjoying some genius in himself—of which he was quite the best judge, and which others were welcome to share, if they so desired. Some observers shared the pleasure he took in his golden smile, and others wanted nothing so badly as to see it knocked off his face. From the look of him, he might have made a great stage entertainer: one sees him, a cane in one hand and a top hat in the other, doing a most elegant soft-shoe. Altogether a character of extravagant outlines. If his name had been Amos Greene, the imagination would have had to change it to Jack Johnson. Almost no other name would do.

But it is as one of the great heavyweight boxers of history that he made his entry into America's consciousness, and it is from this position that we should try to make a reacquaintance with him. Johnson fought seriously from the late 1890s to the mid-1920s; and what glimpses we now get of him are provided by still photographs or by those ancient filmstrips that television sometimes digs up and uses in one documentary or another about how boxing or America used to be. But these strips, made in the days when the camera was just learning how to capture action, do not give us the picture of Johnson we would like to have. With their furious and stilted Chaplinesque motion, they do not show the true pace and flow of Johnson's movements—do not enable us to form an accurate impression of his style, or to compare his technique with those of boxers from whom we have, in more recent times, developed our sense of what is excellent in the ring.

Thus when we hear from people who saw Jack Johnson that he was probably the greatest heavyweight boxer who has ever lived, we are not sure what to make of it. Perhaps these people are right. Perhaps, again, they are only saying what folks of former days are inclined to say—that the stars of their time were superior to any who have come along since. In any case, we hesitate to concur. It is a little hard to believe that Johnson, who fought during what, we now know, was a primitive era of the sport, could have been superior to the modern masters—men who have refined and extended the art of pugilism beyond what it was in Johnson's time. There is, however, one distinction of Johnson's that we are not permitted to question. He was the first black man to become heavyweight champion of the world. Here is a distinction that must not only impress us but must also detain us.

That he was the first of his race to win the championship—in 1908, at an age, thirty, when most boxers have passed their prime (unless it was Jersey Joe Walcott, who, many years later, won the championship at the age of thirty-six or thirty-seven)—signifies something of the spirit and ability that Johnson

JERVIS ANDERSON writes regularly for *The New Yorker*, and is the author of *A. Philip Randolph: A Biographical Portrait*. He is currently at work on a cultural history of Harlem.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had, and something as well of a circumstance in American boxing, or American life, that had prevented any other black heavyweight from fighting for the title. If ability had been all that counted in the early days, then Johnson might not have been the first of his race to fight for the championship; nor, in all probability, would he have been the first to win it.

The early and partly buried annals of prize-fighting are crowded with the names of exceptional black heavyweights, one or two of whom may have been just as talented as Johnson was. Among these are the names of Peter Jackson, Joe Jeannette, Sam Langford, and Sam McVey. All these men fought around the turn of the century, when the heavyweight champions were John L. Sullivan, James J. Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, and James J. Jefferies. Their gifts, however, were left to flourish mostly in the dark—which, of course, was mostly among fighters of their own color. It was Sullivan, the first of what are termed the modern heavyweight champions, who drew the line against boxers of color. He would not, he said, risk his championship against "niggers." A good many white Americans applauded Sullivan's policy; and his white successors in the championship saw no reason to break with Sullivan's precedent. Only by an unusual combination of ability, unforeseen circumstance, and chutzpah was Jack Johnson able to outflank this policy, shatter the color line, and capture the heavyweight championship.

To those white Americans who took an interest in these matters—those, certainly, who understood the racial significance of the heavyweight championship of the world—Johnson's seizing of the title was a profoundly unsettling event. To put it less mildly, the event was seen as a catastrophic development in American race relations. Not only had the championship—one of the most prized possessions in the trophy room of white supremacy—passed into the hands of the Negro race but the agent of its passing was a man who seemed to have no sense whatever of his place in American life. White Americans were surely not going to stand for it.

In 1915, after a number of attempts had been made to restore the *status quo ante*, a way was found to separate both Jack Johnson and his race from the heavyweight championship. This done, and the title, now back in the possession of its original and "rightful" owners, the color line was redrawn, and remained drawn for more than twenty years. Not until 1937 was another black heavyweight, Joe Louis, allowed to cross this line; and, probably to the great surprise of his hosts, Louis won the championship. The color line went out of existence after that. The only two white heavyweight champions since 1937—Rocky Marciano and Ingemar Johansson—showed no interest in restoring it.

Leaping over a few years and a few champions, we land in the age of Muhammad Ali. He is not the third black heavyweight to have won the championship, but, along with Jack Johnson and Joe Louis, he stands as one of the three truly great black heavyweight champions the sport has seen. As this is written, Ali no longer holds the title. His loss of the championship (to Leon Spinks) is disappointing to his millions of admirers. But it cannot have been too surprising. Since Ali's magnificent struggle against Joe Frazier in Manila, he had not been looking like the heavyweight champion he was supposed to be. The late accomplishments of his reign, those that were beyond dispute, had consisted mainly in the growing size of his purses. No matter what the size of his savings account, inside the ring very little seemed to remain of the marvelous nest egg of talent he once possessed. He appeared to have been clinging to the title partly by dint of savvy and partly by the apparent reluctance of scorekeepers—the Pilates of the ringside—to return a final judgment against him. The latter was a striking factor indeed. It was a sign—especially when one recalls what happened to Jack Johnson—of how far American heavyweight boxing had come, or of how much it had overcome, since the early days of the century, when no blacks were wanted as heavyweight champions. For here was Ali—who, in his own way, has been as abrasive to conventional American sensitivities as Johnson was—being helped to hold on to his championship by a boxing establishment that remains largely white.

The reasons are not difficult to uncover. For one, the racial passions that once surrounded the heavyweight championship have abated. But another reason is less easily grasped. It springs—or so many people have felt—from a claim that Ali had upon the con-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

science of organized boxing. This claim dates back to 1968, when Ali refused induction during the war in Vietnam, and when the rulers of boxing, exceeding the terms of their mandate, punished him in behalf of patriotic sentiment. They stripped him of his title, revoked his license, and, as a result, deprived him not only of his livelihood but also of the four years of his professional life during which his gifts might have reached the height of their flowering. Hence the desire of the boxing powers to mark the scorecards in his favor, no matter how shakily he has performed. The reason this act of atonement has not been so easily understandable is that it comes from the inner life of an institution, organized boxing, whose capacity for remorse or humane feeling had not, for a very long time, been publicly known.

Still, it was the view of a steadily increasing number of people—some who had never disliked Ali and some who had never done anything else—that the time had come for him to be left to stand or fall on his own. He may have been left to his own resources last February, when he lost the championship to Leon Spinks. All the same, there was a certain historical inconvenience in Ali's downfall at that time. Thinking about it now, one finds oneself wishing that his dethronement had not come before March 31 of this year. Jack Johnson's autobiography, *Jack Johnson: In the Ring and Out* (first issued in 1927, and now out in a new edition) carries the reminder that he would have been 100 years old at the end of last March. It would have been fitting if the centennial of Johnson's birth had found Ali still in possession of the title, for, both in personal and in boxing style, no two heavyweight champions have borne so close a resemblance.

In temperament and technique—to say nothing of the dissimilar influence he had upon the public attitudes of his period—Joe Louis stands between Ali and Johnson like an immensely powerful but mute effigy, although one in which a good deal of eloquence seems to be trapped. Louis was as splendidly gifted a fighter as either of these two men. For that reason he too must have had his share of enemies, however small, among white Americans who still had not made peace with the idea of a black heavyweight champion. But because his personal style was more winning, or at any rate less troubling, than Ali's or Johnson's, he enjoyed a greater affection and wider acceptance among his fellow citizens. His opinions on public matters—on the rare occasions when he revealed himself to be in possession of any—were of the soothing and reassuring kind. He is not known to have rocked the boat on any vexed social question, or to have dissented publicly from any national attitude that was strongly held.

The country first took Joe Louis to its heart in 1938, when he destroyed the Aryan pretender to the championship, the German heavyweight Max Schmeling. This occurred at an hour when, under Hitler's broadening shadow, the lights were once more going out all over Europe, and at just the time when the morale of the Western democracies stood in need of a boost. At that moment, Joe Louis also became a more inspiring symbol within the black communities of America than Jack Johnson had been or Muhammad Ali was to become. In the war that followed, Louis enlisted willingly on his country's side—which, in one of his infrequent disclosures of opinion, he announced to be God's side as well. In the course of the acclaim he received, almost everyone said he was an asset to his country and—a term that now sounds quaint and faintly condescending—a credit to his race. Of course, not every black person in the United States shared those sentiments about Louis. Many members of his race would have liked a more assertive and irreverent public style in their heavyweight champion. To them, the championship was not just a pedestal but a platform which, especially when occupied by a black American, was to be used as much for purposes of advocacy as of ornament.

But one forms the impression that Louis was not as seriously taken with himself as the public was. While people were praising him for one thing or upbraiding him for another, he was satisfied to remain the simple, laconic, and retiring man he felt himself to be. From some of the photographs that were taken of him at the height of his fame, one senses that he was not always present in the spirit of whatever fuss was being made over him. He seems to have understood that he was required to surrender himself from time to time into the hands of those who—more impressed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with his position than he was—felt he was worthy of tribute. But during all these rites there was on his face either the slightest of smiles or a look that suggested he would just as soon be back in his room taking a nap or enjoying a bowl of his favorite ice cream.

By comparison, Jack Johnson looks to have been the sort of man who never sat still long enough to take a nap, and whose taste did not run to anything quite so bland as ice cream. By no means the taciturn and self-effacing man that Louis is, and just barely short of being as garrulous and boastful a one as Ali, Johnson took a very serious view of his position as champion; and he did not allow modesty, since he had none, to discourage him from celebrating himself or anyone else from acclaiming him. The ways in which he was different from Louis were almost as many as the ways in which he resembled Ali. Yet there were at least two important characteristics that all three men shared: each was superbly gifted as a boxer, and each desired very much to be himself. In Johnson, the latter trait is said to have expressed itself in the form of arrogance. That at least was the view taken by some of his contemporaries. But this is not the impression one gains from his own account of his life. Rather one gets the impression of confidence (perhaps overconfidence), high self-esteem, a strong belief in his legal rights as a citizen, and a joyous obedience to what was dramatic and colorful in his character. This is worth pointing out, although, as we know only too well, self-portraits do not customarily accommodate themselves to the unflattering or inconvenient detail.

Here, at all events, are some of the forms of conduct for which Johnson was considered arrogant. For a long time he simply had no equal in the ring; he knew this, and he left no one in any doubt that he enjoyed the knowledge immensely. During some of his fights, even when he appeared to be taking a licking, he was to be seen flashing his golden smile in the face of his adversary or in the faces of people at ringside who were cheering hoarsely for his defeat—which, in most instances, was chiefly what they had come out to witness. Like Ali, he sometimes taunted his opponents; left his chin or his chest wide open and invited them to throw their best punches; and did not take as much pleasure in knocking out opponents as he did in outboxing them, embarrassing them, prolonging their suffering. One observer has said that Johnson "avoided scoring knockouts, as a rule, not out of kindliness but because he simply liked to 'keep order' in the ring and demonstrate his defensive speed of hand and eye." He himself was once quoted as saying: "If I were a bullfighter, I would make the public think I was within inches of death, but I'd keep my margin of safety. I did in the ring . . . against the men I beat when I was at my best. I was padding backwards round the ring for three rounds out of four. Defense always wins in the end, if it is good enough."

Outside the ring, Johnson dined and dressed splendidly. He sometimes drank the best wines through a straw. He made and maintained friendships among white women, at least two of whom he married. He owned the fastest and most expensive automobiles of his day, and was known among his friends as a speed fiend. He once opened a place in Chicago, his Cabaret de Champion, that was more richly furnished than any similar establishment in town, right down to its silver cuspidors, decorated in gold. And, overall, he carried himself as unapologetically as any white champion or citizen was entitled to do.

But there seems to have been another side to Johnson that only his acquaintances knew or cared to know. One of them has written:

> While he makes no claim for scholarly attainments, [he] is nevertheless no stranger in the world of books and writers. . . . He browsed through books on all subjects—fiction, science, art, history; he has read them in three languages—English, French, and Spanish. He is conversant with works of Shakespeare, and can discuss and quote the plays of this greatest of English writers with an ease which reveals that he has delved deeply into his volumes. With the modern writers he also has close acquaintanceship through their books, but when discussing books and the names of Alexander Dumas and Victor Hugo are mentioned, Johnson becomes more alert than ever, for these are two of his favorite writers and he has read them thoroughly. While his schooling was interrupted before he reached high school, he has nevertheless attained an education of thoroughgoing character. . . . The classics are quite to his liking, and he not only joys in hearing the finest compositions of the masters, but he plays their compositions himself, for he is a musician of no mean ability, his favorite instrument being the bass viol, which he plays in a talented manner.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I am not qualified to state whether all of this is true or not. Johnson does allude to some of it in his book, but that may be no guarantee of its accuracy. Damon Runyon once said of Johnson's life story that it is an enthralling tale "if he tells the truth." At any rate, all the high-culture stuff about Johnson makes for a complex and arresting addition to the stereotyped picture of him that exists in the public mind. Whether the public of Johnson's day would have behaved any differently toward him, had the intellectual dimensions of his personality been widely known, is a question that cannot be answered now. It is for his "arrogance" that he was known; and on that account he paid a higher price in public hostility than anyone in the history of American prizefighting.

Writing in *The New Yorker* nearly thirty years ago, the late John Lardner referred to the conditions that prevailed in heavyweight boxing until the time that Johnson won the championship. Lardner wrote:

> It is indicative of the character of Johnson that he defied white-black conventions in the ring and managed, by sheer stubbornness, to circumvent a phenomenon called "the color line" in winning the heavyweight championship. The color line was introduced in America by the first American heavyweight champion of the world, John L. Sullivan, who refused to meet Peter Jackson, an outstanding boxer from the West Indies. For years, it was invoked by each succeeding champion, including Jefferies. Jefferies did box with one Negro, Hank Griffin, not long after he won the championship, but that was a four-round match, merely a sort of exhibition. As Jefferies' reputation and dignity increased, he drew the line firmly. When he retired, unbeaten, he named a pair of relatively harmless Nordics—Marvin Hart and Jack Root—as leading contenders for the title. Hart beat Root. Hart was then beaten, in 1906, by Noah Brusso, a Canadian, who boxed under the name of Tommy Burns. . . . He whipped a number of Americans, after which he went abroad.

In Tommy Burns's departure with the title, Johnson saw an opportunity he could never hope to gain here at home. By then, he had beaten most of the best heavyweights in America, except, of course, the reigning champions. Wherever Tommy Burns went—through England, Ireland, and France—Johnson followed, challenging the champion at every stop. Burns treated the matter with the contempt that was then customary, and proceeded to Australia. Arriving in Sydney in 1908, and finding that Johnson had followed him there too, Burns relented and accepted the challenge. Johnson was not so elated with that turn of events as to overlook the problem of refereeing. While he did not doubt his ability to wrest the championship from Burns, he was not sure he would be able to do so in the presence of a referee who was pledged to protect Burns's interest—Australia being an even whiter country than the United States. Allowed, then, to have a referee of his choice, Johnson turned to a man who he felt would be no more than moderately unfair to him. "For every point I'm given," Johnson said to the referee of his choice, "I'll have earned two, because I'm a Negro. But I want to be sure I get my one point, anyway. There's only one man I know I can trust to give it to me, and that's you."

The ensuing battle was, from all accounts, a mismatch. Johnson, in characteristic fashion, toyed lengthily with Burns. Hot words were exchanged. One such word was "yellow." Burns had called him yellow before the fight began. "Who's yellow now, Tommy?" he said. This was a surprising word to use to a man of Johnson's fighting record and obvious determination, and an even more surprising one to use to a man of his color. Burns, it is said, was alluding to the story that when Johnson was a boy, growing up in Galveston, Texas, a member of his family had accused him of having a yellow streak. Burns was not the first of Johnson's opponents who had made use of the story. Certainly the streak was nowhere in evidence against the champion, unless it was to be seen in Johnson's reluctance to throw a knockout punch. After he had outboxed Burns for fourteen rounds, a detachment of the Sydney police called an end to the proceedings—not wishing any further embarrassment either to themselves or to the man who had clearly lost the championship.

Under ordinary circumstances, the new champion, on his return to America, would have received a hero's welcome. He had, after all, reclaimed a title that had come to be regarded as American property. But the circumstances were not, of course, ordinary. Johnson was black; and, although he was also American, the property he had brought back home belonged to the portion of his country

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that was white. The manner of his returning was far more painful to white Americans than had been the manner of Tommy Burns's leaving—for Johnson was received much as though he were the bearer of goods that he himself had stolen. According to John Lardner, "The fundamental tenet of a good many anti-Johnsonites was that rule of the heavyweights by any Negro was a threat to civilization. The idea was developed mostly in saloon and street-corner talk, but it had sporadic support in newspapers, too—in large Northern cities as well as in the South." Since a man like Johnson could not be permitted to keep the championship, it became necessary to unearth some pearl of a white challenger to take it away from him. The search for such a redeemer went on from 1909 to 1915, and it was during these years that the term "white hope" entered the American language.

After Johnson defeated the first couple of white hopes that came to the surface, a call went out to James J. Jefferies. The view was suddenly taken that if there *was* a heavyweight champion in America, then, by God, that man was Jefferies. After all, he had retired undefeated. Although he was now, in 1910, thirty-five years old, he had retired only six years earlier, and could not, it was felt, already have lost his great powers. It was therefore his duty to come out of retirement and, as one writer put it, "redeem his race's honor in person."

Jefferies answered the summons, and met Johnson in Reno, Nevada. According to Johnson, the fight was "attended by more famous sporting men, boxers and promoters than any other. . . . Prominent men from all walks of life had come from England, France, Spain, Mexico, Australia, Canada and every corner of the world to see what they hoped would be the return of the heavyweight crown to the head of a Caucasian." Jefferies must also have been aware of the international character of the assembly. He was surely aware of its hopes. He gave of his best, but he was knocked out in the fifteenth round. Whatever might have been the outcome six years earlier, Jefferies was in no shape to beat Johnson in 1910. Here are parts of Johnson's report:

> The crowd gave me a hearty reception, but that given Jeff was twenty times greater than mine. . . . Hardly a blow had been struck when I knew that I was Jeff's master. From the start the fight was mine. . . . He fought his best. . . . His brain was working keenly, but he found it impossible to get through my defense. . . . He landed on me frequently but with no effect. . . . I took part in the palaver that went on, addressing myself particularly to Jim Corbett, a member of Jeff's training staff, who took occasion to send a few jeering remarks in my direction. I told Corbett to come in the ring, that I would take him on too. . . . I hit Jeff at will. There was no place that was beyond my reach. . . . I really did not have any desire to punish him unnecessarily. The cheering for Jeff never ceased. The spectators . . . gave him every possible encouragement, but their cheering turned to moans and groans when they saw that he was suffering as he was. . . . I heard them shout: "Stop it! Stop it!" The great crowd cheered Jefferies for his grit. . . . The crowd was by no means pleased. The "white hope" had failed, and as far as the championship was concerned it was just where it was before . . . except that I had established my rightful claim to it beyond all possible dispute.

At least, in Johnson's own eyes. In the eyes of most others, his victory meant only that the search for a white hope had to be intensified.

In July 1912, Johnson was brought up on a charge of violating the Mann Act—transporting a woman across state lines for immoral purposes. Johnson said that he was innocent; that the woman, who happened to be white, was his secretary; and that the charge was clearly part of the campaign to drive him from the championship. His plea was not accepted. Although he married his traveling companion before the trial began, he was found guilty and sentenced to a year and a day in jail. Rather than serve, he escaped to Europe, where he spent the next nine years.

In Europe he seems to have been something of a celebrity. An American who visited Europe at the time said later, "I saw his limousine blocking traffic in the Paris boulevards while the white people struggled to shake hands with the burly black man." In his book, Johnson alleges that he "rubbed shoulders" with European royalty and aristocrats; "disported on the French and Italian Rivieras"; was a bullfighter in Spain; gained entry to "some of the finest homes in Mayfair"; in Moscow associated with Russian field marshals and aides to Czar Nicholas; mixed with artists, scientists, and writers; and, on one or two visits to Mexico, became friendly with President Carranza.

During the first three years of Johnson's

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

exile, the search for a white hope went on in America. Whenever one was found he was dispatched to Europe to find Johnson and retrieve the championship. But none of these missions bore fruit. The campaign to replace him as champion finally paid off in April 1915, when Johnson was induced to come to Havana, Cuba, and risk his title against Jess Willard, the latest of the white hopes. As the records show, Johnson was knocked out in the twenty-sixth round, thereby relinquishing the title to the original line of succession.

One has to say "the records show" because the circumstances leading up to the fight in Havana, and whether or not Johnson was indeed knocked out, are not clear. There are at least three versions of what happened. One is that Johnson was then dissipating himself in Europe, that he was in a weakened condition, and that the boxing promoters in America had seized that opportunity to put him in the ring against Willard, their greatest white hope yet. Another is that Johnson was broke, and had agreed to come to Havana and exchange his championship for the right amount of cash. A third is that he had been promised that if he surrendered the championship to Willard all would be forgiven, and he would be allowed to return to America as a free man. The last explanation is the one Johnson himself gave in his book:

> Preceding the Willard fight it was hinted to me in terms which I could not mistake that if I permitted Willard to win, which would give him the title, much of the prejudice against me would be wiped out. Those who chafed under the disappointment of having a man of my race hold the championship, I was told, would be mollified, and it would be easier to have the charges against me dropped . . . that there would be no further prosecution of me, and that I might settle down quietly and live in peace with my fellowmen.

The promise, if indeed it was made, was either not meant or not kept. Johnson went on:

> I had cause to regret my action, for after I had allowed the title to pass to Willard, I found that such offers or hints of leniency as had been tendered were without substantial foundation, and that immediate prospects for my return to my own country without going to prison were so slight that I could not give them serious thought.

So Johnson returned to Europe and resumed his wanderings.

Six years later, at the age of forty-three, he crossed the Mexican border into the United States, having, in his words, been "haunted by the constant wish to see my own country and to live amid the scenes that were dearest to me." He was taken into custody and later sent to Leavenworth, where he served the major portion of the sentence he had received in 1912. When Johnson was released, Jack Dempsey, who had won the heavyweight title from Jess Willard in 1919, was still the champion. But Dempsey was not risking his title with black heavyweights. The color line had been reinstated. Harry Wills, the best black heavyweight to emerge in Johnson's absence, was studiously avoided by Dempsey—although it is still believed that it was not the color line Dempsey was obeying so much as it was his fear of losing to Wills. Jack Johnson, however, was never allowed near the heavyweight championship again. His challenges were refused with the explanation that he was now too old to fight for the title. Still, he is said to have remained in remarkably good physical shape. And it was his feeling that even approaching his middle forties he would have extended Dempsey, with a good chance of beating him. But former champions are like that: they seldom know when their great powers are gone. Johnson went on fighting, off and on, for a number of years, mostly in exhibitions. His last fight is said to have taken place in 1945, when he was sixty-seven. He died a year later, in an automobile accident near Raleigh, North Carolina.

A question that is commonly debated among boxing fans concerns the following: Who was the superior champion—Ali, Louis, or Johnson? Each faction, like schoolboys on a playground, welcomes the opportunity to display its arguments but remains quite inaccessible—except in rare instances—to persuasion. At least two of the champions in question have displayed a similar fidelity to their own opinions. The more voluble example of the two is Muhammad Ali, who never fails to maintain that he is the greatest heavyweight champion that there ever has been or ever will be. Although he needs absolutely no help in advertising his claim or himself, millions of his admirers have joined him in the effort. Here, though, is a testimony from Harry Carpenter, a British sports jour-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nalist, who had this to say, after watching Ali's victory over George Foreman, in Zaire: "How many years had I been hearing Ali say: 'I'm the Greatest'? Always I had listened, laughed, enjoyed, and yet kept a doubt aflame in my mind. The Greatest? With Johnson, Dempsey, Louis, Marciano there before him? As the sun came up in Zaire . . . I reflected upon what I had just seen, and admitted to myself: yes, very likely he is the Greatest."

Harry Carpenter belongs to that faction which, on the rare occasion, changes its mind. He had once held an opinion about Joe Louis similar to the one he later came to hold about Ali. A pity he ended up being converted, because no heavyweight champion has stood in greater need of spokesmen than Joe Louis—so little, during his career, and even now, has he bothered to say for himself. He has neither made nor encouraged comparisons of himself and other champions, whatever his private views may be. One cannot remember an athlete of similar status who has been more reticent on the subject of his own merits, or has seemed less concerned with what ranking he is assigned in the history of his profession. Perhaps Louis feels secure enough in his private judgments. Perhaps he is genuinely indifferent to what others may have to say. Perhaps he considers this whole business of historical handicapping to be more than slightly risible. But one suspects that it may also be some strain of civility in him, or a certain dignity he associates with the position of champion, which forbids his engaging in the cheap exercise of promoting himself, of earning self-regard at the cost of belittling the importance or accomplishments of others. It has been said that one great work of art does not displace another. Perhaps Louis carries this piece of knowledge in him, along with his trapped eloquence. Such claims as have been made on his behalf have come from his supporters, especially those who remember the magnificent fighter he was in the late 1930s and early 1940s. To some, like Bob Considine, a columnist for the Hearst press, Louis was too good to be believed. "Joe Louis," Considine wrote in 1940, "may be the greatest heavyweight we've ever had, or just the best of a bad lot." And this is what Harry Carpenter had once thought, before he changed his mind about Ali: "Louis had the look of the finest fighting machine yet produced. . . . No man's perfect. But Louis came as close as anyone."

Jack Johnson did not claim, in his autobiography, that he was the greatest of the heavyweights, although he may have had quite a lot to say outside its pages. Of course, he did not have Ali or Louis to think about. When he wrote, in 1927, Ali was not yet born, and Louis was a boy in his teens. Those with whom he contested for historical supremacy were the white champions (from Gene Tunney all the way back to John L. Sullivan) and all the great black heavyweights who had never been allowed to fight for the championship. There is, however, enough evidence in Johnson's book to show that he considered himself second to none. Before sending the book off to the publishers, Johnson solicited a few prefatory comments from his contemporaries "in regard to my boxing ability." From what is known about Johnson, it may be safely said that he was not the sort of man to request testimonials from sources that were likely to dissent from the opinion he held about himself. Ed W. Smith, a referee and sportswriter, who had witnessed a number of Johnson's fights, replied that "Jack presents ability that is impossible to rate too highly and next to impossible to match, then, now, and possibly ever." One J. B. Lewis stated that Johnson was "credited by all as being the greatest defensive fighter of all time." A sports columnist for the New York *Evening World*, who wrote under the name of TAD, gave the opinion that "Johnson was the greatest heavyweight of all time." Damon Runyon said that "no greater defensive fighter than Johnson ever lived." And in the main text of his book Johnson cited the result of a poll conducted by *Ring* magazine, in June 1927, which "shows that those competent to judge overwhelmingly nominate me as the greatest heavyweight boxer of all time."

Clearly, it is not only the fans of former days who are chauvinistic about their own heroes and their own times. Latter-day fans concede nothing to earlier heroes and earlier times, either. In the realm of sports, people do not very much esteem the achievements that they themselves did not see, and find it hard to imagine that future ones can be better. Imagining these three great fighters as finalists in a championship, one wonders what

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the outcome would be. Each contained strengths and weaknesses that make it difficult to predict, now, how well one would do against the other. In some ways, the issue is better left unresolved, for we retain three discrete gems whose facets sparkle and fascinate in various ways.

Toward the end of his life, Jack Johnson did have the opportunity to witness Joe Louis's ascent to the heavyweight championship of the world. It could not have been a pleasant experience for Johnson. Ever since he had become the first black man to win the championship, he had been somewhat reserved in his praise of other black heavyweights; indeed, he had not had much that was good to say about any of them. During his reign as champion, he had made a point of avoiding the better black contenders. It is possible he did not wish to endanger his position as the only black champion in history. In watching Joe Louis acquire the championship, then, he was seeing a man who had robbed him of one of his great distinctions—and, in view of the public acclaim and affection Louis was enjoying, a man who seemed to be surpassing whatever measure of popularity he once enjoyed.

Johnson does not appear to have liked or to have been impressed by what he was seeing of Louis. In July 1939, a columnist for the New York *Age*, now defunct but once the leading newspaper in Harlem, reported upon an interview he had recently had with Johnson. "I asked him," the writer said, "what he thought of Louis. He said he was not interested. But he told me of his trip to Norwalk, Connecticut, to visit an old friend, Mayor Stack. The Mayor closed down business to entertain Jack and took a ride in Jack's Lincoln Zephyr, with Jack at the wheel; they had a motorcycle escort all over town and into the colored section, where they had a grand ball. The Mayor showed Jack some of the new projects that are in construction in behalf of race people. Everybody went for the ex-champ."

Jack Johnson may not have liked what he saw of Joe Louis, but perhaps he *was* impressed: impressed enough to profess a lack of interest in Louis, and to seek reassurance from one of the recent pages of his own yellowing scrapbook. Old champions being, of course, what they are.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kate's Poem

Sally Harris Sange

It all came up
one morning (in the bathroom).
I knew it wasn't the flu
milling and moiling inside me,
riding Ixion's wheel,
daring my belly to swallow a thing,
sending me often to bed without my supper.
I knew it wasn't ordinary
fatigue: that wonderful necessitude
to slip between the sheets.

I suspected my husband. For years
he'd been up to something: circling
that one forlorn spot like a wrong-
headed hawk, searching for survivors.
Dipping a wing, his feather-touch
would glide across my canyon
and light—there was always light—
as he found his place and
(one last feathers' ruffling)
settled in.

What I want you to understand
is this: he was looking
for someone all that time. He
wasn't just flying around. And
he was right. There's someone
in here with me. It's that marvelous
Kate, and she's dizzy
again. What shall we do with this giddy
girl who paddles around with eyes wide open
in amniotic bliss? Kate's my one oasis.

A water child, water herself,
coming from water, bring-
ing a flow, she holds the hum
of mother-blood in her deep, separate
pulse. The murmur

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of my desultory heart disturbs her
sleeping so she cries out
loud in her airlessness and knocks
against her silvery walls
until the fine bone hardens and no one comes.

Kate, if I could hold you
in the circle of these arms,
you would find they are
less round but not as lonely.
This life is not so deep
as we had thought, but it is
wide. If you should inherit
your mother's stride, walk
the earth as far
and proud as earth will take you.

Or if you find
your father's strong voice
singing through, call out far.
There *are*
desert places. But if anyone
can turn the sand
that sifts the time
to fluid,
it is you,
my wobbly daughter.

Since we found you here,
we've seriously considered having a baby.
I mean, we think we'll let you out.
But always you must
remember: it was your father
found you, and he will find you
again, as I pray I can, as I pray
your time with us will bring
the flood-tide years all
three of us expect.

● SALLY HARRIS SANGE teaches Arabic at Virginia Commonwealth University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fiction and Anti-Fiction

GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

From the amount and quality of noise emanating from those who have been talking about American fiction in the past few years, one might well infer that fiction itself is in serious trouble. How often it is proclaimed that the novel is dead (not the short story, for some reason). Again, there is contention about whether science fiction should be admitted to the precincts of literature. And what, in the name of all that is taxonomous, is a "non-fiction" novel? This hubbub, however, far from being a symptom of trouble, seems to me mostly a sign of fictional energy and diversity; there is a lot there worth talking about, and it won't stay put. Something is wrong, all right, but not with fiction itself, which is in very good shape by the only criterion that matters: excellent novels and stories are being published in abundance. What is wrong is the way so many people talk about fiction. The reason this matters very much is that the noise they make interferes with—hinders at best, distorts at worst—the coming together of story and audience. Before saying something about fiction itself, I am going to discuss a few of the lesser problems being worried confusingly or unnecessarily by those who talk about fiction, and then deal with the main one, the supposed death struggle between fiction and anti-fiction.

What is the difference between fiction and autobiography, between fiction and the new journalism? That is, how much of his own life or of history can a writer of fiction include, how honestly must he do it, how faithful must he be to the facts? (In their different ways, both *Roots* and *Ragtime* present this problem.) The question can be and has been answered, but it keeps getting asked anyhow in one form or another, as even the best answered question usually does when it has real life in it. I could give my answer here and now, but if I did, all I would accomplish would be to add a decibel or so to the din.

Or take the science-fiction dispute: "We are special. Treat us seriously." A great many fictional subgenres could or do make the same claim: the black novel, the spy thriller, women's fiction, the southern novel, the sea story, the city novel, the western, children's stories, the historical novel, the Catholic novel, the fiction of Jewish Americans, American Indians, Polish Americans, chicanos, Armenian Americans. . . . (I even stumbled once on the Staten Island story.) From a strictly literary point of view, these are pseudocategories. There is no theoretical reason why a work of fiction from or about any such group should be treated differently from a work of serious fiction. Most sci-fi stories, like most stories of all sorts, are without literary interest, but those that are worth talking about should be treated like any other satire or philosophical story. (There is, however, at least one such group that is intrinsically subliterary: the detective story. It reveals motivation in a manner antipathetic to good fiction, so that the closer a detective novel is to a true novel, like Ross MacDonald's *The Blue Hammer*, the further it is from a true whodunit.) Since all these nonliterary categories actually exist in the world, and matter because they are in one way or another important in the lives of their members and to varying degrees in the life of society at large, they must be treated with respect. But they belong to the sociology of fiction rather than to fiction itself or to the criticism of it.

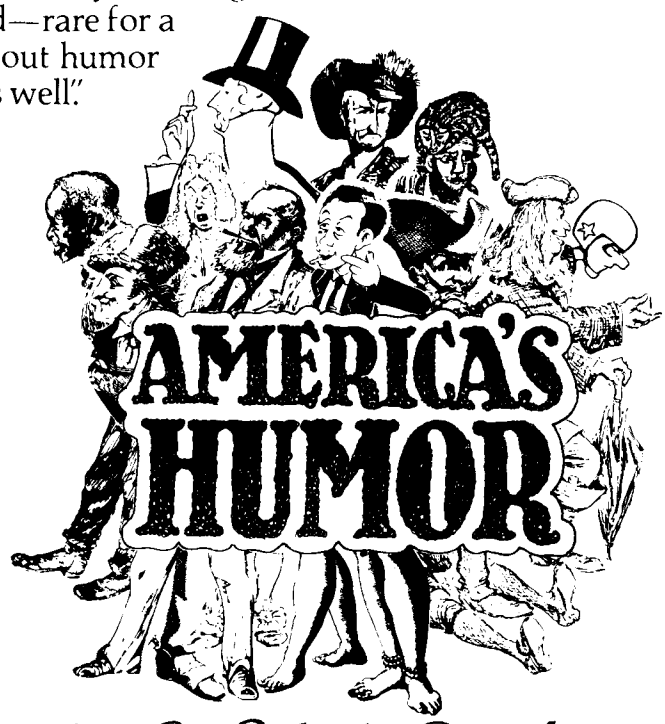
GEORGE P. ELLIOTT is a professor of English literature at Syracuse University. He is the author of *Conversions*, a book of essays, and of *Muriel, Among the Dangs*, and *From the Berkeley Hills*.

© 1978 by George P. Elliott

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

AMERICA
reflected in a fun-house mirror.

From colonial woodsman to Woody Allen, American humorists have reflected the past experience, present concerns, and future visions of the American people. Now, two of the country's leading authorities on comic literature trace the evolution of this distinctive red-white-and-(occasionally)-blue tradition in humor in a study that is "graceful, provocative, and—rare for a 'serious' book about humor—entertaining as well."
—*Justin Kaplan*



From Poor Richard to Doonesbury

1478
1978

WALTER BLAIR
& HAMLIN HILL

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS
200 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016

With 46 illustrations,
$17.50

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fiction always has been an impure art, to the irritation of aestheticians who insist that, just as meaning is irrelevant to a fugue or a mobile, so it has nothing to do with what makes even the most realistic novel a work of art. They are right, of course. So are we non-aestheticians who insist that one requirement of a valuable piece of fiction is that it mean something, that it say something worth listening to about human connections, and that it cause such connections to come into being between and among reader-characters-author. William Gass, in *Fiction and the Figures of Life*, is the principal such aesthetic theorist; his best story, that tiny marvel "Order of Insects," does what fiction should do, according to my theory as well as his. Perhaps the true argument is this: Are fictional emotions and connections part of life, and hence subject to moral considerations; or can they be regarded as purely aesthetic ingredients in a work of art, and hence exempt from ethics? A serious and often noisy argument—one not to be resolved so long as people find fiction worth talking about.

One sort of noise I find especially grating is the clamorous demand, emanating principally from New York and widely disseminated in academia, that fiction reveal, or portray, or provide insight into—that it be "relevant" to—the age, the modern condition. If you want to find out what the going opinions are on such matters, a handy source is John Leonard, the "cultural commentator" for the *New York Times*. In the *Times Book Review* last year he said, in effect, that contemporary American writers of fiction cannot be first-rate because they have been sheltered from the crucial experience of our time, that of totalitarianism. It may be that even the best American writers now should be considered minor, but this judgment can be arrived at only by reading them, not by applying to them an a-priori theory about why they must be minor. It seems unlikely that either Lady Murasaki's *The Tale of Genji* or the Icelandic *Njal's Saga* is a superb narrative simply because in the first quarter of the eleventh century the action was in Japan, but in the last quarter of the thirteenth century it was in Iceland. (Or did Hegel not just reify the word zeitgeist, but divinize the thing itself—so that before him an age could not be said to have a spirit in the modern sense? Chalk up another one against him!) The demand for "relevance" has become troublesome because it seems to press so many writers to go against the grain of their talent; for instance, Kurt Vonnegut's fiction is sodden with a doomful hopelessness that such light, deft stories were never meant to bear. This is too important an issue to be dealt with cursorily, and it shades into my main subject, the tension between traditional fiction and anti-fiction.

Anti-fiction, of course, claims to be the only way—and is in fact an excellent way—to figure forth the quandary peculiar to modern man. In the eyes of those who look at a work of literature primarily to discuss how well the zeitgeist manifests itself therein, it is self-evident that the contemporary psyche, modern society, and the foreseeable future are irredeemably fragmented, alienated, uncontrollable, and so on, and that therefore modern fiction should have such qualities too. In itself this would do little harm; after all, there is such a thing as the age, a matter of importance to those who live in it, and no major form of art is as inextricably entwined with the age as is fiction—except for pure fantasy. But unfortunately the zeitgeisters are very great noisemakers. Worse yet, they think they know what the spirit of the age is, so that when they read a story they already know what to look for, and they judge in considerable measure according to how well it conforms to their orthodoxy.

Meanwhile, if you are one of the many who are not disposed to wrangle over this emotional bullying, but are in the mood for a couple of guaranteed non-"relevant" stories still of this sublunar world, may I recommend two recent novels? Macdonald Harris's *The Balloonist* and Thomas Gavin's *Kingkill* abound in love and adventure. The characters are credible, mysterious, and extraordinary enough to be a pleasure to know. The prose styles of both novels are unfailingly delightful and intelligent. Reading them will not instruct you in the ways of neurotic guilt, Armageddon, ingeniously loveless sex, the horrors of the bourgeois family, Nothingness, or the rest of the ideological impedimenta issued to every good soldier of the armies of the zeitgeist.

Literarily, an important conflict went on for twenty or so years between traditional fic-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW BOOKS FROM LSU

WOMEN WHOSE LIVES ARE FOOD, MEN WHOSE LIVES ARE MONEY

POEMS BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

Illustrations by Elizabeth Hansell

This new collection may well be the most substantial poetic work of the woman who, according to *Newsweek*, "belongs to that small group of writers who keep alive the central ambitions and energies of literature."
$7.95

Winner of the Jules F. Landry Award

THE WARY FUGITIVES

FOUR POETS AND THE SOUTH

Louis D. Rubin

Rubin masterfully explores the relationship between the writings of John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, and Robert Penn Warren and their work as agrarian social critics.
$24.95; $7.95 paper

AND THEN

A Novel by Natsume Sōseki

Translated from the Japanese by Norma Moore Field

This second in a trilogy of novels by one of Japan's most popular writers reveals a young man's inability to find new values in the conflict between traditions of feudal and modern industrial Japan.
$14.95

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Baton Rouge 70803

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion and anti-fiction. Everybody knows what straight fiction is. It tells a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end, the events of which are usually arranged in chronological order. You get to know some people in it, and you are far more interested in them than in the author, at least while you are reading the story. It is about people trying, with varying degrees of success (plenty of sinners but no saints), to get along in the world, whether or not that world is seen by them and/or the author as finally if not proximately intelligible; and it assumes that at least some persons are worth paying respectful attention to for their own sakes, not because of what they typify or because of their place in the world. Such fiction is spoken of by the anti-fiction extremists with boredom, contempt, and patronizing indulgence, as the sort of stuff written by such fuddy-duddy dodoes as Saul Bellow and Louis Auchincloss.

What anti-fiction is has been much less clearly defined, and the fact that anti-fiction and its writers were claimed by the counterculture during the sixties did nothing to clarify matters. Traditional fiction—according to the polemicists then and to some diehards now, who haven't noticed that the counterculture war is over—is conservative, obsolete, establishmentarian, repressively authoritarian; whereas anti-fiction is progressive, now, radical, and liberating. In reality, almost no writers worth talking about belonged or stayed in the slots assigned to them by the propagandists. Since James Baldwin spoke so eloquently against racial injustice, the radicals did not exactly stress the obvious fact that his fiction was incomparably more conservative than that of, say, the late Vladimir Nabokov, who was politically far to the right. To add to this confusion, anti-fiction was let into the Establishment: Donald Barthelme began publishing regularly in *The New Yorker;* John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* became a best-seller after being praised on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review;* Nabokov, Jean Genet, and Jorge Luis Borges were widely honored; and the great Outsider himself, Samuel Beckett, accepted a Nobel Prize. Never mind. Despite all the high jinks and mud, there was a real and substantive literary conflict going on there for a while—although, by and large, the farther you got from New York and from academic departments of literature, the less it mattered.

Anti-fiction may include a story, but will fracture it. It may include characters, but they will be neither credible nor coherent. It forbids, ignores, or frustrates the reader's usual sympathies and antipathies. Instead, it connects the reader with the narrator's mind, which is in an abnormal state. At the mildest, it is in a state of perplexity about itself and its contents; at the extreme, it is in a state of despair, or of megalomaniacal suspiciousness (paranoia being anti-fiction's madness of choice), or of nihilism. Since most of what is in any mind comes from outside itself, and since how a mind thinks and feels is largely shaped by other persons and by society, the narrator's perplexity has to do both with what is out there and with how his mind is connected to what is out there—especially to society and others. The most important mode by which the narrator's mind has been shaped is language, and the only way he can connect with that stranger, his reader, is with words. Consequently, the prose of anti-fiction is to a high degree adroit and self-conscious. To qualify as worth being talked about at all, an anti-story must be stylistically special in a way a straight story seldom is. The emotions aroused in the reader of anti-fiction vary. He may feel chilled pity, as for the desperate narrator of Barthelme's early stories; a sort of mesmerized boredom, as by *Giles Goat-Boy;* disgust; misanthropic pessimism; the campy pleasures, especially of kinky sex and ironic pornography; even, as with Lore Segal's delightful *Lucinella,* affection for the narrator, although this is very rare since it verges on, and indeed begins to blend into, "straight" fiction. Always, whatever else, the reader must feel admiration for the writer's verbal energy, intelligence, control.

In 1973 the American anti-fiction camp got its Big Book: *Gravity's Rainbow.* Richard Poirier (in the March 1973 *Saturday Review*), after asserting that Thomas Pynchon's *V.* had been "the most masterful first novel in the history of literature," went on to say that *Gravity's Rainbow* was "a profound (and profoundly funny) historical meditation on the humanity sacrificed to a grotesque delusion—the Faustian illusion of the inequality of lives and the inequality of the nature of signs." (Take a couple of seconds to let the last phrases of that sentence sink in.) And Bruce

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Selected Letters of Conrad Aiken

edited by Joseph Killorin

"These letters by Conrad Aiken held me fascinated to the end and left me wishing for more. Immensely varied in mood . . . but always candid and brilliantly phrased, they made me wonder whether Aiken, among his other distinctions, wasn't also the last of the great letter writers. His editor, Joseph Killorin, makes no such claim for him. He places the episodes unobtrusively, he identifies the characters, but for the rest he simply chooses the most dramatic or revealing letters (from among three thousand others) and allows them to speak for themselves. Speak they do, and unforgettably."
—Malcolm Cowley

"One of the important correspondences of this century."—Mark Schorer Illus. $15.00

Yale University Press
New Haven and London

William Faulkner

Toward Yoknapatawpha and Beyond

Cleanth Brooks

"Designed as a companion piece to Brooks's earlier *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, this study concerns Faulkner's pre-Yoknapatawpha poetry and prose as well as the five novels (*Soldier's Pay*, *Mosquitoes*, *Pylon*, *The Wild Palms*, and *A Fable*) not set in Mississippi. . . . Together with the earlier study, this work is sure to become a landmark in Faulkner criticism."
—*Library Journal* $17.50

Main Currents of Western Thought

Readings in Western European Intellectual History from the Middle Ages to the Present

Fourth edition

Franklin Le Van Baumer

In the quarter of a century since its first appearance, *Main Currents* has remained unquestionably the leading reader in its field, containing passages that best represent and illuminate the ideas and preoccupations of each age. For this fourth edition, Baumer has rewritten the introductory essay to the section on "the age of anxiety" and added thirteen new excerpts, enriching the earlier sections of the book and introducing three major figures of the twentieth century.
Cloth $30.00 Paper $9.95

A World with a View

An Inquiry into the Nature of Scenic Values

Christopher Tunnard

"A book which represents the broad perspective of a superbly inquiring mind. [Tunnard] emphasizes the preservation of the aesthetics of the landscape while at the same time emphasizing the need for realistic compromise with the realities of urbanization and development. He succeeds admirably in accommodating the inevitability of construction while pointing out the practical necessity for beauty and the need to cherish the souls of man."—S. Dillon Ripley 70 illus. $15.00

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Allen (in *Library Journal* for March 1, 1973) said that *Gravity's Rainbow* was "the most demanding novel anyone has ever written, and it is surely among the most rewarding." Aha! Anti-fiction had won the battle of the books. But no! Traditional fiction makes a comeback! Peter Glassman (in the Autumn 1977 *Hudson Review*) proclaims John Casey's *An American Romance* to be "unquestionably the finest novel to be published in our nation in at least a generation." (It's a first novel too, so that really wipes out Pynchon.) Glassman likens it to *Clarissa* and the late work of Henry James, but goes on to say that "unlike Richardson and James, Casey is gifted with a whole imagination." Then, "Casey's brilliant and beautiful novel offers itself as a version of the entire known world. . . . Civilization periodically renews itself by calling such intelligences as John Casey's into creative and public service. Casey's novel is a work of civil reconstruction, a testament of holy value for our taut and fatigued society." (It is not clear to me that there are any winners in hoked-up contests like this, but I do know who the losers are: good books.)

Maybe these novels really are what their blurbists say they are. I don't think so. It seems to me that *Gravity's Rainbow* presents ingenious fantasies of universal conspiracy that neither correspond to reality nor are held together by a steady vision of reality—but project, and only project, the frenetic anguish of a powerful, highly gifted, and dazzlingly learned mind. *An American Romance* renders its central characters and their world as well, I suspect, as they ever will be rendered: young, white, affluent Americans in the late sixties—educated, deracinated, sexually liberated (with all that implies, including some pornography), but outside of politics and ideology. The invisible, immanent author makes no mistakes in constructing the story or in understanding his characters, including the peripheral ones, of whom there are many. But unfortunately he does make a rhetorical choice that limits the novel unduly, keeps it from being the high accomplishment of which Casey is surely capable. The language is inadequate. It is too close to the language of the characters, and even the most intelligent of them speak, as such people speak in life, a language incapable of carrying the imaginative energy and controlling irony of high fiction. At its worst, the novel's language produces sentences like these: "Her lack of this knowledge [of what in her turned other people on] made sustained sexual drama impossible. In fact, she was put off by any notion of mutually sustained theater in which the orchestration of feelings between two people became the end." In context, these sentences are totally unironic; they cannot be attributed to the character or to anyone but the author himself. What they say is true and worth saying, but they say it clumsily.

By now, it seems to me, the combat of fiction versus anti-fiction is effectively over and both sides have won. Anti-fiction has developed a number of narrative techniques that are now as available to any writer who wants to use them as are the traditional techniques. Anti-fictional techniques, like traditional ones, can of course be turned into mere tricks for which there is a market. Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* has a certain energy and cleverness. With the nastiest conceivable intrusion into the selfhood of others (one reason not to read the book is that it can irritate you so severely that you find yourself, in mere reaction, sympathizing with Richard Nixon), it pushes the buttons of educated, affluent, America-the-Guilty liberals. The Ernest Hemingway Foundation Award was given last year (by Elizabeth Hardwick, Susan Sontag, and E. L. Doctorow) to Renata Adler for her *Speedboat*, a book decked out with anti-fictional mannerisms and chic New York intellectual accessories—so much so that one might suppose it to be filled with the usual existentialist qualities, with Nothing especially, when all it is is hollow.

However, at solitary desks, where most of what happens in literature quietly happens, a goodly number of writers of fiction are doing work that seems to me excellent. Many of them are writing better than they used to. Their stories are strengthened by what fiction and anti-fiction have contributed to each other; those two quondam combatants have turned out to be anything but mortal enemies. Now that the real conflict is over, the residual racket being generated by opinion-makers, it is easy to see various things that once were somewhat obscured. For example, Nabokov was on both sides all along; my candidate for his most nearly perfect fiction is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now Available:

Adam Smith:
The Man and His Works
By E. G. West

1776 was a year of momentous events, including publication of *The Wealth of Nations*—the book that launched the movement for economic liberty. Here is a brisk look at the author of that epic, written for the layman and student. Hardcover $6.95, Paperback $1.45.

The Wisdom of Adam Smith

Adam Smith may have been the first great economist, but he was no dismal scientist. He was instead a man of great philosophical and historical learning, and his literary style was widely admired. *The Wisdom of Adam Smith* brings together his most incisive and eloquent observations on subjects ranging from political and economic history to morals, philosophy, art, education, war and the American colonies. Compiled by British scriptwriter and playwright John Haggarty, edited and with an introduction by Benjamin A. Rogge. Hardcover $7.95, Paperback $1.95.

The Theory of Moral Sentiments
By Adam Smith

Adam Smith's first book will startle those who think capitalists are purely selfish, for Smith fully understood that liberty must be based in a moral order. Dr. E. G. West, who writes the introduction, asserts that "if *The Wealth of Nations* had never been written, this previous work would have earned for him a prominent place in intellectual history." *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was greeted with rapturous praise in its own day. Smith's friend David Hume wrote to him from London soon after the publication, telling him that "the public seem disposed to applaud it extremely." The "mob of literati," Hume added, "are beginning to be very loud in its praise." Hardcover $9.95, Softcover $2.95.

LibertyPress LibertyClassics

We pay postage on prepaid orders.
To order these books, or for a copy
of our catalog, write:
Liberty*Press*/Liberty*Classics*
7440 North Shadeland, Dept. 276
Indianapolis, Indiana 46250

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that straight little story "Signs and Symbols" (or maybe *Pale Fire*). And Borges, the grandfather of much of the best anti-fiction, connects, and always did connect, the reader with a mind that is humane, gentle, good, steeped in tradition, worthy of great love. Only the supreme nihilists Genet and Beckett remain intransigent, refusing to compromise with what Genet calls "your world"; in the sixties both of them renounced writing. With those renunciations, along with the end or near end of the careers of Borges and Nabokov and the celebrated boom in Latin-American fiction during that decade, literary modernism, of which anti-fiction is the most important part, may be said to have ended as a movement. Literary history will come up with plenty of reasons why this happened when and as it did. What matters to writers in the late seventies, and what should matter to readers, is that those who were adversaries can, if they wish, be friends or at least colleagues.

Within the last couple of years, Stanley Elkin has published his best novel, *The Franchiser;* it is funny, extravagant, and morally serious, but there is no point in categorizing it. John Gardner has published his best fiction too, *October Light*, a fine straight novel into which he inserts a punk anti-novel (now why did he do that?). John Cheever's *Falconer* is his strongest book and a defier of labels. Is it fabulous, or allegorical, or anti, or what? Who cares? That's the good thing: how to label this wonderful story other than as fiction is not worth fussing over any longer. Ursula Le Guin emerged from what she herself (in *Antaeus* for Spring/Summer 1977) calls "the science fiction ghetto" and published *Orsinian Tales*, short stories as imaginative and serious as Cheever's—at once timely and timeless, rich, intelligent, peopled. Raymond Carver's *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* contains a score of fine stories equally pro and anti. Andrew Fetler's *To Byzantium*, Wright Morris's *Real Losses, Imaginary Gains*, and Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* are straight, while William S. Wilson's *Why I Don't Write like Franz Kafka* is anti. So?

This list is intended to be less hierarchical than illustrative, and I conclude with Wallace Stegner not just because his last two novels are excellent but also because his own fictional career illustrates my thesis. Until *Angle of Repose* and *The Spectator Bird,* his fiction had been straight. Now, himself in his sixties, he narrates each of these novels in the person of a *senex iratus* who is largely adverse to the world he is part of and who avails himself of some of adversary fiction's artifices. Stegner has not abandoned realism; he has added to it, complicated it, fantasticated it. Karen Blixen appears briefly as a character in *The Spectator Bird*, and the novel incorporates into itself a tale worthy of that old sorceress who was also Isak Dinesen. Perhaps the crown to all this is that Stegner, by sophisticating his technique, has found a way to integrate his fine intelligence into his fiction far more than before, both overtly as wisdom and also structurally. In *Angle of Repose*, the narrator says of Victorians, "They could tell a good woman from a bad one, which is more than I can do any more." As a rough rule of thumb, the less solid the structure of morals and manners of the society being represented in a realistic fiction, the more intricate that fiction's own structure had better be.

Literary modernism has not died, it was not excommunicated, it is not being superseded. It is being absorbed into the great tradition, to the general benefit and especially to the benefit of realistic fiction, which had been getting somewhat etiolated. At least that is the state of things as seen from provinces which the zeitgeist does not tyrannize over.

Imaginary Enemies, Real Terror

DELMORE SCHWARTZ: THE LIFE OF AN AMERICAN POET. *By James Atlas. Farrar, Straus, Giroux. $15.*

Reviewed by SIDNEY HOOK

No one will be able to put down James Atlas's critical yet sympathetic biography of Delmore Schwartz without deep sadness. The sadness flows from a growing sense of fatality as the pattern of Schwartz's life develops in these fascinating pages. One experiences a

SIDNEY HOOK, emeritus professor of philosophy at New York University, is senior research fellow at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace at Stanford. Among his recent books are *Pragmatism and the Tragic Sense of Life* and *Revolution, Reform and Social Justice.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW FROM *Texas A&M University Press*

Castello Branco: The Making of A Brazilian President.
By JOHN W. F. DULLES
Foreword by
ROBERTO DE OLIVEIRA CAMPOS

This biography of Castello Branco up to his inauguration as president of Brazil in 1964 examines his influence on the army; his participation in World War II and the overthrow of Goulart in 1964; and the development of his political thought, particularly his dedication to "legalism" in government. Sources include personal papers heretofore unavailable and interviews with Castello Branco's family and contemporaries. 486 pp. $17.50

The Roots of Lo Mexicano: Self and Society in Mexican Thought, 1900-1934.
By HENRY C. SCHMIDT

Samuel Ramos' *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico* (1934) launched the modern search for Mexican identity, but the concept of *lo mexicano* (the Mexican ethos and its study) emerged soon after the 1910 Revolution. Schmidt traces the origins and development of *lo mexicano* in the works of Ramos' intellectual antecedents, particularly Sierra, Caso, Vasconcelos, Reyes, and Cosío Villegas. 256 pp. $11.50

The Bandit King: Lampião of Brazil
By BILLY JAYNES CHANDLER

This book presents the first reliable account of the famed desperado Lampião, who confronted armies, cowed politicians, and dominated the Brazilian northeast in the 1920's and 1930's. Using contemporary news accounts, archival materials, and extensive interviews, the author examines both the brigand and the society that produced him, one in which frontier conditions reminiscent of the American West persisted far into the twentieth century. 320 pp. $15.00

Two Peacemakers in Paris: The Hoover-Wilson Post-Armistice Letters, 1918-1920
Edited by FRANCIS WILLIAM O'BRIEN

Fresh insights into the views of Hoover and Wilson are revealed in the letters that passed between them while they participated in the Paris Peace Conference after World War I. Included are the details of their abortive attempt to stop the civil war in Russia and to provide food for that starving nation. Professor O'Brien's introduction underscores the herculean tasks of Wilson and Hoover as they confronted the complex problems of peacemaking. 200 pp. $12.50

Arms and the Wizard: Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions, 1915-1916
By R. J. Q. ADAMS

When Great Britain's traditional methods of supply broke down under the appalling demands of the fierce conflict on the Western Front, Lloyd George organized the new munitions department. Adams vividly describes his opening up of the new ministry to "outsiders" from the professions and business, his commitment to a policy of state control of national production, and his unprecedented power over labor, capital, raw materials, and machinery to "deliver the goods." 200 pp. $13.50

Texas A&M University Press

DRAWER C, COLLEGE STATION, TEXAS 77843

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recurrent feeling that his tragic and tortured career need not have taken the turns it did had someone or something intervened to help or advise. Yet in the light of Atlas's masterly compilation of the evidence of the wide support and sympathy, indeed the active help, Schwartz received from friends and admirers, it is difficult to believe that the ultimate outcome, in its essentials, could have been different.

Delmore Schwartz was a student of mine at New York University before he won fame as a poet and critic. Although he majored in philosophy, his passionate interest in literature was apparent in his extracurricular activities. Together with Sigmund Koch, he edited a student literary magazine of considerable sophistication. At that time he was part of the circle whose twin stars were the gifted Koch sisters, Adrienne and Vivienne, but it soon became apparent that he did not share their popularity. There was an undisguised elitism about Delmore that some of his fellow students interpreted as snobbism. He tended to denigrate American culture and literature at the same time that he glorified European life and letters.

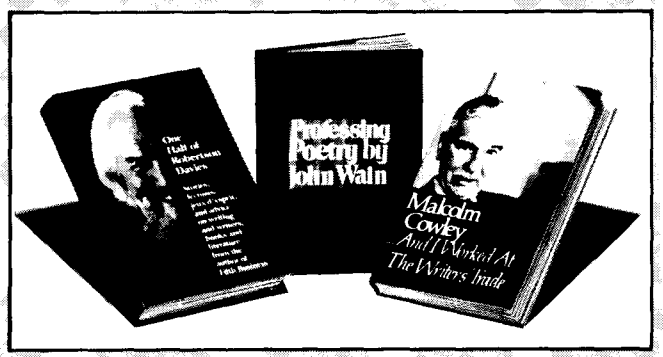
Of considerable surprise to me was the discovery of a strong hostility toward Delmore from some of his classmates in philosophy courses. This seemed to reflect relationships that had developed outside the classroom of which I was unaware and whose causes I never understood. Delmore participated in classroom discussions, but I noticed that his interventions, which I always encouraged, were almost invariably greeted with criticism and sometimes derision by some of his fellow students who mistook his intellectual independence for captiousness. In Delmore's time, most of the students who specialized in philosophy were either Marxists, varying from the Social Democratic to the dogmatic Trotskyist persuasion, or logical positivists. Delmore was neither. He seemed to have read some neo-Thomist essays that profoundly affected him. At any rate he was committed to the Aristotelian essence doctrine. In one stormy class session he resolutely refused to accept the paradoxical analysis which asserted that the egg was potentially just as much an egg sandwich as it was a chicken. I no longer recall the theme of the discussion that suddenly led to an exchange of blows between Delmore and one of the more cantankerous of his detractors. I had to seat them apart in future sessions, as if they were second-graders in elementary school. I never believed that the medieval students of philosophy who fought with drawn swords over the question of the objectivity of universals were animated purely by zeal for clarity and truth. In the twentieth-century philosophy classroom it was obvious that fisticuffs over essences or problems of verification had their source in the personalities of the students rather than in their ideas.

I got to know Delmore best, not in the classroom or during office hours, to which he never came, but in walks to the subway or to restaurants or publishers' offices. He would wait for me to emerge from the north exit of the Main Building at Washington Square three or four days each week. Sometimes I would prolong my walk with him if my appointment was not urgent and our conversation interesting. We talked of various things, and although at the time I was unaware of his poetic gifts, I was impressed by his sensitiveness and the catholicity of his interests. What I remember most vividly was his deep concern with the Aquinate proofs of the existence of God. I vaguely recall his mention of Jacques Maritain. Again and again he would return to this theme. Whether he was only teasing or in earnest I cannot now say, but he did indicate that he was very much attracted to the Roman Catholic Church. I was rather alarmed to hear this. It was a time when quite a number of bright young students at the University of Chicago and elsewhere had become converts. I cautioned Delmore to reflect carefully before he took the plunge. On a subsequent occasion, after I had voiced my concern, I was immensely relieved when he suddenly turned to me and said, "Don't worry, Professor Hook. My father isn't in real estate for nothing!" This was his way of telling me that he was not a naïf prepared to act on the ideas he was entertaining either for the love of it or to discomfit those he did not like.

Delmore kept in touch with me episodically after he left New York University. Fame came to him early, and in the light of his subsequent development it is obvious that it went to his head. I was rather put off by his treatment of Gertrude, his first wife, who was also a student at NYU, an intelligent and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW FROM VIKING...



—AND I WORKED AT THE WRITER'S TRADE
Chapters of Literary History, 1918–1978
by Malcolm Cowley
These sixteen warm and eloquent chapters of literary history deal with situations and problems in the lives of American writers since the First World War. "Malcolm Cowley's enviable mastery of American literary history and criticism has never been better expressed than in—And I Worked at the Writer's Trade. It is a luminous book, a crackling book—one that gives off a shower of sparky and sparkling ideas that have the force of wisdom." —ALDEN WHITMAN
0-670-12291-2 288 pages $12.50

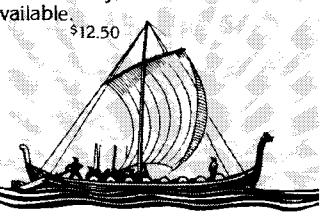
ONE HALF OF ROBERTSON DAVIES
by Robertson Davies
Canada's leading man of letters, Robertson Davies is a novelist, a scholar, and a professor whose command of literature is surpassed by few. This enchanting collection of speeches and lectures reveals the other side of Davies—as an actor and master storyteller whose command of the spoken word has made him one of the most popular public speakers of the day.
0-670-52608-8 304 pages $12.95

PROFESSING POETRY
by John Wain
Professing Poetry collects a series of lectures given by the author during his tenure as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University. His themes extend into every corner of the art form, from commentary on luminaries past and present such as W.H. Auden, Emily Dickinson, Philip Larkin, and William Empson, to exploration of the form and theory of poetry.
0-670-57888-6 288 pages hardbound $12.95
0-14-004933-9 288 pages paperbound $3.95

RUSSIAN THINKERS
by Isaiah Berlin
The phenomenon of the Russian intelligentsia is the theme of this highly readable and stimulating collection of essays on nineteenth-century Russian thinkers, writers, dissenters, and revolutionaries. The collection includes Sir Isaiah's famous essay on Tolstoy and history, "The Hedgehog and the Fox," which has long been unavailable.
0-670-61371-1 336 pages $12.50

Write for free catalogs.

THE VIKING PRESS
625 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

likable person who could have been a steadying influence on him. He dropped her as well as the Kochs when his star rose in the literary firmament. I met him several times at the homes of editors of the *Partisan Review*. He fancied himself as not only a poet but a man of the world and a realistic political analyst, in which latter roles he was quite unconvincing. I was shocked by his rude and cruel treatment of Elizabeth, his second wife, who seemed so vulnerable in her early infatuation with him. When I once gently expressed my puzzlement at his behavior, he burst out in a furious denunciation of her infidelities, which were clearly imaginary. From what I was told about him it seemed that his conduct was becoming more and more arbitrary. He began to drink, and he once called on me when he was in a state of glassy-eyed inebriation. It seemed to me that he enjoyed a kind of *Narrenfreiheit* among his friends: none of them dared call him to account lest he lose his temper and cut them out of his life.

Toward the end of his life he showed up in my office to borrow money, and spoke darkly about conspiracies being hatched against him. The news of his death came as a great shock. I could not help feeling that, although he had many friends whose help he had exploited and sometimes spurned, something could have been done to save him from himself. But what could have been done I do not know.

There can be little doubt that Delmore Schwartz was afflicted with insanity. It was latent, and no one who knew him as a student and youthful writer could have suspected its eruption. Nor can anyone reasonably claim that he was driven to insanity by a hostile or indifferent society. Few persons of his age were ever given more opportunities to follow their calling, or enjoyed more kindnesses, or received more praise and encouragement—not only from friends and colleagues but from established figures in the world of letters, of whom some were known for their critical acerbity and others, one might have suspected, were touched with envy. At twenty-four, the world was Delmore Schwartz's oyster. Yet he lived a largely miserable life and died a miserable death—and made others deeply miserable as he wound his way to the end.

What makes Delmore Schwartz's affliction more mystifying is that even after his violent paranoia had landed him in Bellevue's psychiatric ward, he had periods of great lucidity during which it was possible to hope that his obsessions had lifted, especially those that centered around his martyred second wife—whom this boastful and indiscriminate philanderer had falsely taxed with infidelity.

In the fall of 1960 he gave me, after one of his periodic visits to my office, a copy of a brochure consisting of three lectures given in 1958 at the Library of Congress under the auspices of the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Poetry and Literature Fund and entitled *American Poetry at Mid-Century*. It was inscribed, "To Sidney—Master of those who love reason and study irrationality, from Delmore, October 1960." One of the three lectures was Delmore's "The Present State of Poetry." (The other two were by John Crowe Ransom and John Hall Wheelock.) His essay was an eminently reasonable, informative, and witty analysis of the new estate that poetry had won in American life—its positive and negative features. It justified his implied claim in the inscription: to be one who loved reason, at least in theory, and studied irrationality. In part it is a scathing analysis of the political idiocy of the frothy San Francisco Howlers—a circle of new poets who were pretending to lead an insurrection against a nonexistent threat of oppression. They were even attempting to link the residual philistinism of American cultural and literary life with the unmitigated Soviet political and cultural terror in Europe. One of the Howlers had asserted, "Poets are coming to San Francisco for the same reasons that Hungarians have been going to Austria recently" (in the aftermath of the ruthless suppression of the Hungarian revolt of 1956). In a sardonic reply to those who held this and similar views, Delmore Schwartz observed that apparently they did not "recognize the difference between the Red Army and the *Kenyon Review* critics, between Nikita Khrushchev and John Crowe Ransom or between the political commissars of a police state and the tyrants who write advertising copy on Madison Avenue."

With exemplary common sense, he rebukes those who were drawing equations between America's occasional failure to live up to its ideals of freedom and the systematic destruction of civil and cultural freedom in total-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

itarian states. As his other activities and judgments show, Delmore Schwartz was certainly not advocating a defense of the American social and political status quo. He was merely calling into question, at a time "when the future of civilization is no longer assured," the wisdom of making criticisms of the undeniable shortcomings of American life the "primary preoccupation" of its intellectuals. He recognized a priority in the order of evils and threats to the life of freedom. "To criticize the actuality upon which all hope depends becomes a criticism of hope itself."

It should be pointed out that not all his political judgments were marked by this refreshing common sense. During the grim years when it appeared that Hitler and the Japanese warlords might be triumphant, he refused to endorse the policy of critical support of the war against fascism. He did not go as far as Paul Goodman and other irresponsibles who declared that American workers had more to fear from Roosevelt than from a triumphant Hitler. His opposition to the war, discreetly expressed, seemed to stem from a fear that reports of great battles and other events would distract the public's attention from his forthcoming books of poetry. His vanity, rather than any reasoned view of history and society, came into play in many of his observations.

In truth he was even less a political thinker than a philosopher. No matter how bizarre his judgment—and, unfortunately, his behavior—it was almost always extenuated by friends and admirers on the ground that he was a poet, even by those who were up in arms at the political judgments and activities of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Whether by accident or because he was somewhat inhibited in consequence of the teacher-student relationship of the past, on the few occasions when I met him socially he was quite restrained and not as voluble as others have reported. But I recall being told by the editors of the *Partisan Review* several times, as something especially noteworthy in their poetry editor, that "once he got lit up" he would talk excitedly and knowledgeably about politics.

Atlas's book makes clear that even if psychologically Delmore Schwartz had been more normal and even tempered, he would have had a hard time coping with the sudden-

The Theatrical Photographs of Napoleon Sarony

by Ben L. Bassham

Two streams of Gilded Age popular culture—the thrill of the stage and the rise of commercial photography—came together in Napleon Sarony. From Sarah Bernhardt (above) to Sandow, the stars trooped to his camera, leaving us a visual record of a great age in American theatre. Bassham presents not only a generous sampling of the portraits but an incisive analysis of the man, his art, and his times. *11 illustrations, 44 plates, paperbound, $8.50*

The Kent State University Press
Kent, Ohio 44242

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness and intensity of his early success. It went to his head, and he was terrified lest he could not live up to expectations in his subsequent work. This fear of failure had a paralyzing effect on him. He had given too many promises about himself that had been taken at face value. He had drawn all the material for his poems from his own life, but it was a life that was mostly imagined and reconstructed from vague memories. To some extent his strange behavior and his involvements with others were attempts to find fresh experiences that he could poetically exploit.

The speculation is idle, but I cannot help wondering whether, if Delmore Schwartz had not been overpraised, if he had been firmly criticized with no obvious evidence of unfairness, he might not have developed differently and led a more disciplined, less wayward life. He peopled his world with imaginary enemies in order not to blame himself. Perhaps if his early published work had met with a more balanced critical reception, his efforts to modify or refute the negative judgments might have led to a more productive and less unhappy life as a poet and a human being.

Last Pagan in Purple

JULIAN THE APOSTATE. *By G. W. Bowersock. Harvard University Press. $12.50.*

Reviewed by EDWARD N. LUTTWAK

Julian ruled as sole emperor for not much more than one year and a half. His attempt to disestablish Christianity had failed, and when he died of a war wound he left nothing behind him except for an unsuccessful campaign against the Persians. And yet this emperor of brief reign and nugatory achievement has attracted very great attention from his own day to ours. Not only have much history and much polemic been written about him, but also novels, good and bad, including a recent best-seller; and the modern Greek poet Cafavy thought him a sufficiently transcendental figure to make him the subject of seven poems of quite remarkable quality.

There seem to be two reasons for all this interest: first, Julian's record can be easily misinterpreted as that of a liberal hero (he decreed "freedom of religion" and tried to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem); and, second—a much better reason—we know more about Julian's personal life and outlook than we know about any other figure of Roman antiquity with the exception of Cicero. His own writings survive in great part, and these are of a personal rather than official character and are therefore revealing of the man. The narrative sources on Julian are relatively abundant, and there are also some epigraphy, valuable numismatic data, and important legal evidence preserved in the Theodosian Code. The sources for the fourth century are otherwise so poor that Julian emerges alone as a well-lit figure in a great darkness. Hence the ample modern literature, including several full-length monographs.

Yet G. W. Bowersock's book is not redundant; on the contrary, it is an important work. Bowersock makes full use of some fragmentary evidence that others have neglected, and he reinterprets usefully. The major contemporary sources, aside from Julian's own letters and other writings, are those of Libanius, a pagan Sophist from Antioch and a major figure of his period, and those of Gregory, Julian's schoolmate in Athens and later bishop of Nazianzus in Cappadocia. Libanius pro and Gregory contra would have been well balanced had the history written by Eunapius of Sardis survived; since his *Lives of the Sophists* is with us, we have some idea of how precious a witness has been lost.

But of course another of Julian's contemporaries was Ammianus Marcellinus. Not only was he the most important Latin historian of the entire period but he also served as an officer in Julian's armies and was on the scene of the ill-fated Persian campaign. Bowersock's most important contribution is his reinterpretation of Ammianus Marcellinus as a source of information about Julian's life. Ammianus wrote in the annalistic tradition and therefore gives us a chronological account—precisely what is missing in the other contemporary sources. As a result, modern historians of Julian have always tried to integrate ma-

EDWARD N. LUTTWAK is adjunct professor in the School of Advanced International Studies at the Johns Hopkins University and senior fellow of the Georgetown Center of Strategic Studies. He is the author of *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century A.D. to the Third.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terial from other sources into the framework that Ammianus so conveniently provides. Bowersock argues convincingly, however, that Ammianus did not use his own memory, but rather based his account on the lost history of Eunapius, which itself relied in part on the testimony of a personal friend of Julian's, the pagan physician Oribasius. The principal evidence for Bowersock's contention is the similarity between the account given by Ammianus and that found in the sixth-century history (in Greek) of Zosimus, a pagan survivor. Circumstantial evidence strongly discourages the notion that Zosimus would have used a Latin source, whereas there is conclusive evidence that Zosimus did follow Eunapius, of which he was in fact the epitomist for the passages on Julian. Hence similarity points to Eunapius as a common source for both Ammianus and Zosimus—which of course means that Ammianus was not the dominant source. As Tacitus, his model, certainly did, Ammianus was trying to write a work of art. For this purpose a Greek text of literary merit and classic form was no doubt better raw material than the rude, soldierly memories that Ammianus retained in his own mind when he sat down to write his history almost three decades after the death of Julian.

Accordingly, Bowersock's account differs from other modern works in that he reconstructs his Julian in his own synthetic framework instead of following Ammianus. The results are convincing. As for evidence neglected, the most important is that of the Syriac poet Ephraem from Nisibis in northwest Mesopotamia. He was not only a contemporary of Julian's—and a bitterly hostile one—but he was also an eyewitness of the late phases of the Persian campaign.

Bowersock's Julian is not a liberal humanist; rather, he sought to persecute Christianity as his Christian relatives had persecuted him—not for being a pagan, since that was his secret until he had attained the purple, but for being a cadet member of the ruling family and thus presumably a threat to the Emperor Constantius II, son of Constantine the Great. Nor is Bowersock's Julian the Neo-Platonic philosopher whom many have wanted him to be; his principal intellectual baggage was not Neo-Platonic philosophy but rather Neo-Platonic mysticism, which

Myth and Meaning
CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

One of the world's greatest living thinkers offers his insights into the nature and role of myth in human understanding. The five lectures in this volume discuss the historical split between mythology and science, the nature of what we have called 'primitive' thinking, and outline the relationships between mythology and history and music. A broad and penetrating perspective on the shape of western thought. $10.00 cloth, $4.95 paper

On the Idea of a University
J. M. CAMERON

At a time when the value of university education is being questioned, Cameron offers a fresh perspective on the university's purpose, its form, and its future. The book combines a trenchant analysis of the symptoms of crisis in the modern university and some thoughtful proposals for reform. $10.00 cloth, $3.95 paper

Property: mainstream and critical positions
Edited by C. B. MACPHERSON

Political and social theorists, jurists, economists, and historians have taken positions for and against the property institutions upheld in their time by the state, and further discussion seems inevitable. This book brings together ten classic statements on property–from Locke, Rousseau, Bentham, Marx, Mill, Green, Veblen, Tawney, Morris Cohen, and Charles Reich–and places them in historical and critical perspective. Macpherson's introductory and concluding essays outline the issues involved and make a significant contribution to the continuing debate. $15.00 cloth, $5.95 paper

prices are those suggested
at time of publication

University of Toronto Press
33 East Tupper Street, Buffalo, NY 14203

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had already degenerated into magic-making of a vulgar sort. A better man than Julian, a more fortunate soldier and a more successful politician, might well have reversed the tide of Christianity; other Eastern religions temporarily ascendant had earlier been pushed back into their own corners of the empire. But Julian was not the man to defeat the Church, which was already provided with its strongest instrument: a hierarchical and disciplined organization that emulated the secular organization of the empire.

The portrait of Julian that emerges in Bowersock's account is not a pretty one, but it is convincing.

Confession of Friendship

LETTERS TO FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND EDITORS. *By Franz Kafka. Translated by Richard and Clara Winston. Schocken. $24.50.*

Reviewed by HILLEL J. KIEVAL

Letters, by and large, are a very fragmentary source. They form only a small part of a much larger whole, and cannot stand alone in any satisfying way. Many, in their nakedness, are boring and tedious, like a string of five-minute telephone conversations tied end to end. They require elucidation and comment in order to become significant. Above all, they need to be grounded in their historical and social context. The latest edition of Franz Kafka's letters bears out these observations. But because of the peculiar nature of the Kafka *Nachlass*, his letters are even more fragmentary and limited than might otherwise be expected.

Kafka, as is known, destroyed a large number of his own notes and stories, and instructed Max Brod (his close friend and the executor of his estate) to burn unread "everything I leave behind me . . . in the way of diaries, manuscripts, letters (my own and others'), sketches, and so on." Much of Kafka's literature, including *The Trial* and *The Castle*, exists today only because Brod chose not to follow his dying friend's order. He was not able, however, to salvage any of the letters that others had written to Kafka; most of those the recipient had already taken care of. Kafka actually began to destroy stories and letters in his possession long before his final illness. A diary entry of March 1912 indicates that he had burned "many old, disgusting papers," and a letter of January 1922 to Robert Klopstock alludes to Kafka's having tossed all his letters into the fire.

But recent history and a number of editorial quirks have added to the disunity and anarchical state of Kafka's letters. His sisters Elli and Valli perished in Nazi concentration camps, as did his correspondent and admirer Milena Jesenská. Kafka's letters to her have survived only because she placed them in the care of the writer Willy Haas as the Germans entered Prague in 1939. Those written to Elli and Valli, as well as those to his second fiancée, Julie Wohryzek, have all been lost. What letters did survive saw the light of day in a very haphazard manner. Schocken Books has held the copyright to all of Kafka's works, but has still chosen to issue the letters as it has received them from their former owners, one batch at a time and in no particular order. The reading public, as a result, has been accosted with a succession of separate publications of Kafka's letters. They have appeared in at least five different collections since Max Brod issued his first biography of the writer in 1937. No effort has been made to unify them or to arrange them in a chronological or thematic order.

Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors is both a translation and a revised, slightly expanded edition of a collection edited by Max Brod and published in German in 1958. Now, twenty years later, Kafka's letters to Max Brod, Felix Weltsch, Oskar Baum, Robert Klopstock, Martin Buber, and others are available to the English-reading public. The letters were written over the course of twenty-three years—from 1902 through 1924—but the bulk of them stem from the last eight years of the author's life. They touch upon many aspects of the relationship of the writer to his environment, and of his efforts to create, and are marked by that expression of friendship and concern which sustained Kafka's creative endeavor and prevented his dangerously frail personality from sinking.

Kafka wrote his letters in the same cryptic, elusive style that highlights his shorter prose

HILLEL J. KIEVAL is a junior fellow in the Society of Fellows at Harvard University.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

works. He combined brevity and evasiveness in the manner of one who had grown impatient with—or feared—his own thoughts, and he added a cloud of mystery by addressing himself to specific remarks or questions that had been made by his correspondent but have since been obscured by time. One can now only guess at the object of many of his allusions. The early letters, especially those addressed to Max Brod, reveal very little of the author himself. They are nothing more than short messages (often sent beneath the streets of Prague through pneumatic tubes) intended for a colleague to whom all is known and nothing needs to be explained. In most of them Kafka complains of feeling bad; in many he cancels appointments. Before 1917 Brod and Kafka were simply too close for their correspondence to have been important or informative. They saw each other nearly every day; they read favorite works aloud to each other. What need had they to write letters except to cancel a rendezvous or apologize for a missed engagement?

Nowhere is the impoverished state of the early correspondence more apparent than during 1912, the critical year of Kafka's development. Kafka had made his first acquaintance with representatives of East European Jewish culture toward the end of 1911, when a Yiddish theater troupe from Galicia played in Prague. By February 1912 he was organizing and introducing recitations in Yiddish literature by the actor Yitzhak Löwy. In August of that year Kafka met his future fiancée, Felice Bauer, with whom—he writes in his diary—he fell in love at once. Then followed a period of intense literary activity. He began and completed his story "The Judgment" during the night of September 22–23. Over the next month he wrote "The Stoker" and published "A Great Noise." December saw both the completion of "The Metamorphosis" and the publication of his first book, *Meditation*. This was a year marked by the convergence of three great themes in Kafka's life: the impact of East European Judaism; the tempestuous, but futile, affairs of love; and the spilling over of intense family conflict into literary productivity. Kafka's diary entries and his letters to Felice chronicle these developments quite

What it means to Publish with a Leader

EXPOSITION PRESS, INC.
Standard Bearer of Subsidy Publishing

Exposition Press publishes book manuscripts professionally in an average of four months—half the usual time.

Our special imprints—Exposition University (scholarly), Banner (trade), Lochinvar (Americana), Testament Books (religious)—are reserved for deserving works in their separate fields.

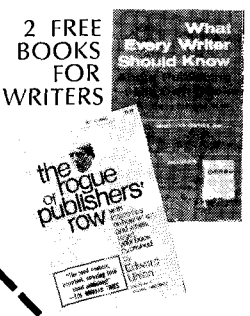
We offer a complete publishing service, including editorial supervision, a dynamic advertising and promotional program and trade distribution.

Inquiries are invited; editorial reports are furnished without obligation.

FREE: Two fact-filled source books presenting a detailed description of our publishing plan, a breakdown of contract terms and typical costs.

COMPLETE AND MAIL TODAY

2 FREE BOOKS FOR WRITERS



EXPOSITION PRESS, INC.
Dept. AS 900 S. Oyster Bay Road
Hicksville, N.Y. 11801 (516) 822-5700

☐ Please send my FREE copies of *The Rogue of Publishers' Row* and *What Every Writer Should Know About Publishing His Own Book* so that I can learn more about the Exposition Press Publishing Plan and get the facts and costs about publishing my book.

☐ I have finished a book; it contains approximately _____ pages (or _____ words).

☐ I have started a book; it will be finished by _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

closely, but his written messages to Brod hardly even hint at them.

Both the circumstances of Kafka's life and the quality of his correspondence changed around the years 1916–17. His health had been deteriorating, and he began to spend more and more time away from Prague. He lost daily contact with friends, and started to reach out to people in writing, to express himself to them, to advise and to cajole on paper. A treasure of information on the cultural, religious, and intellectual life of Central Europe at the end of the First World War emerges from these later years. Particularly worth mentioning are Kafka's growing attachment to Jewish national interests and to Zionism, his sympathy for Czech culture and national aspirations, and the maturation of his own personality in the face of his fatal illness.

The letters appear to corroborate Max Brod's contention that Kafka moved progressively closer to Jewish nationalism after 1917. This is not to say that he ever joined any Zionist organization; he was constitutionally incapable of such a positive step into the realm of political activism. Still he observed with warm interest the nationalist activities of Max Brod and Felix Weltsch; he became a voracious reader of the Prague Zionist weekly *Selbstwehr;* and he wrote imploring letters to its editor, Weltsch, whenever he failed to receive an issue. Kafka counseled young friends and relatives to attend the Zionist agricultural schools that had been organized in Germany, and to consider seriously the possibility of settling down on Palestine's soil.

Kafka's reacquaintance with the Jewish people and their concerns expressed itself in other, less overtly nationalistic ways as well. When he learned from Brod, during a convalescence in Marienbad in 1916, that the Belzer Rebbe and hundreds of his followers had come to the resort town to vacation, he sought out one of Prague's most interesting Jewish intellectual figures, Georg (Jiří) Mordechai Langer, to guide him as he accompanied the Rebbe and his followers on their frequent walks through the streets of the town. Kafka's descriptions of the behavior of the Belzer Hasidim, written with a combination of admiration and ironic amusement, provide fascinating reading.

Martin Buber's journalism and public speaking, his revitalization of Western Judaism through the introduction of a *völkisch,* romantic Hasidism, attracted Kafka's intellectual curiosity, as it did that of many other Central European Jews in this post-assimilatory, nationalist era. The seven letters to Buber which are reproduced in this volume point out that Kafka attended Buber's lectures in Prague, that he and Felice Bauer visited Buber in Berlin, and that Kafka was even asked to be on the editorial board of Buber's *Der Jude.* Kafka turned down the offer, but his "Jackals and Arabs" and "A Report to an Academy" appeared in *Der Jude* in October and November 1917.

Kafka and his immediate circle of friends were part of the German cultural minority of Prague, but they could hardly have been considered patriots of German nationalism. Over and again they expressed disdain for German cultural chauvinism and great sympathy for the creative efforts of Czech culture. Although Kafka himself at one point had wanted to take his degree in German literature, he castigated the bellicose nationalism of his professors. While he was ill, he spent a great deal of time in the Czech countryside with his sister Ottla and her family. He later drew upon this experience in his depiction of rural life in *The Castle* (1922). In 1917 he wrote to Felix Weltsch that he was reading only "Czech and French, and nothing but autobiography or correspondence." After asking his friend to lend him whatever he had of either sort, Kafka added, "I may have already read the best of the lot, a collection of letters of Božena Němcová which for its psychological acumen is unsurpassed." He studied Hebrew off and on from 1917 to 1924, and by 1923 was able to plod through Yosef Haim Brenner's *Shekhol ve-Kishalon (Breakdown and Bereavement),* which had been published in Tel Aviv only three years earlier. Kafka had turned his back on German middle-class culture in many ways by the time he died. His infatuation with East European Judaism, his love of Hasidic stories and Czech memoirs, his last three relationships with women (Julie Wohryzek, daughter of a Czech-Jewish synagogue janitor; Milena Jesenská, Czech writer who lived in Vienna; and Dora Dymant, a Polish Jewess)—all can be seen as elements in a cultural reorientation and redefinition that was in keeping with the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

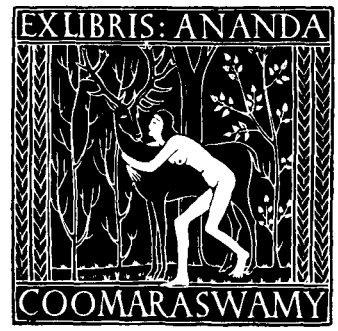
multinational flavor of Central European life after the decline and collapse of the Hapsburg Empire.

Finally, the letters point to Kafka's personal growth and maturity after the onset of tuberculosis in 1917. In the last eight years of his life Kafka came exceedingly close to an understanding of himself. In a letter to Max Brod in November 1917, he describes his own psychological odyssey from the contemplation of suicide to resignation in the face of "a wretched life and a wretched death." Yet after the onset of his illness, he saw a new way out, one suggested by the illness itself, as if by an outside agent:

> It consists in this, or would consist in this—that I not only privately, by an aside, as it were, but openly, by my whole behavior, confess that I cannot acquit myself properly here. This means I need do nothing but continue to follow with the utmost resolution the lines of my previous life. As a result I would assume a coherence, not dissipate myself in meaninglessness, and keep a clear-eyed view.

Kafka did not die a man totally at peace with himself or his environment, but he made amazing strides in that direction. He achieved a sense of balance by stepping outside of the closed circle of his own immediate existence and by seeking contact with others. He established selfless, lasting friendships with writers, younger sanatorium patients, and a medical intern from Budapest, to touch upon but a few. His remark to Brod, "How lucky, Max, to have you," expressed much more than blind flattery.

Schocken's team of editors has clearly taken advantage of the advances in Kafka scholarship that have occurred over the last twenty years. It has relied heavily on the work of Klaus Wagenbach and Hartmut Binder and on the materials that emerged from the Kafka Symposium of 1964. Wolfgang Sauerlander, the person responsible for updating and expanding Max Brod's original notes, paused often to clarify references and allusions which Brod himself did not comment upon. The resulting scholarly apparatus is both impressive and useful. One cannot peruse the detailed notes at the end of the volume without feeling that one has brushed against the core of Central European intellectual history during the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century.



Coomaraswamy ✣

Volume 1: Selected Papers, Traditional Art and Symbolism
Volume 2: Selected Papers, Metaphysics
Edited by Roger Lipsey
Volume 3: His Life and Work
Roger Lipsey
"Ananda Coomaraswamy was an extraordinary figure in American cultural life in the 1930s and 40s. He opened up to the West an approach to the appreciation of Indian art, philosophy, and mythology that has transformed our understanding of these subjects. This collection of essays gives us his scholarship and brilliant insight; and the life by Roger Lipsey is a rounded, gently critical, always interesting portrait of this unique personality."
— *Joseph Campbell* • *Bollingen Series LXXXIX*
Vol. 1, $30.00 • Vol. 2, $30.00 • 2-vol. set, $50.00 • Vol. 3, $17.50

NEW IN PAPERBACK

Human Understanding
The Collective Use and Evolution of Concepts
Stephen Toulmin
Paperback, $5.95 • Cloth, $16.50

The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge
Some Methodological Questions
Ninian Smart
Paperback, $3.95 • Cloth, $9.50

Religious Movements in Contemporary America
Edited by Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone
Paperback, $6.95 • Cloth, $25.00

Princeton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

On the other hand, the letters in this edition are not as new and original as Schocken's publicity would lead one to believe. Almost all of them—even those that were not included in the 1958 German edition—have been published before and are known to Kafka scholars. Only four short notes to Martin Buber (none of them surprising or harboring insights) have never before appeared in print. It is true that we are no longer deprived of the wealth of valuable material which up to now has been locked within the German edition, and this fact alone might justify the book's appearance. Nevertheless *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors* perpetuates the fragmentation and incohesiveness that have come to characterize Kafka's *Nachlass*. One can but question why Schocken has not yet acted to change this pattern of confusion.

To its credit, the book does present the reader with a view of a maturing Kafka, his "work relationships," and the friendships he cherished most dearly. It describes a man who rubbed shoulders with the leading figures of Central European Judaism and Zionism, who expressed empathic love for Czech national aspirations, Yiddish culture, Kierkegaard, and French literature. Above all, it is the portrait of one who, in the face of illness and hovering death, broke through the barriers of unfulfilled hopes and tragedies, reached out for friendship and community, and—perhaps—learned to live with himself.

The Figure Under the Carpet

CONAN DOYLE. *By Ronald Pearsall. St. Martin's Press. $10.*

REX STOUT. *By John McAleer. Little, Brown. $15.*

Reviewed by LEON EDEL

These two books, the overwritten life of Rex Stout and the underwritten life of Conan Doyle, offer striking suggestions for biography. The lives they contain illustrate, more vividly and directly than most lives, how the "personal myth" of a given individual becomes the biography itself and gives it significant form. And how, if the storyteller misunderstands or ignores the personal myth, a "wrong" biography is often written. Few biographers are aware of personal myth; as a consequence they seldom know what to put in and what to leave out. Rare indeed are the biographers who have learned the meaning of significant detail. The secret of selection, it seems to me, resides in possessing the personal myth of the subject as a guide, a kind of slide rule that leads us into the hidden center of a life. For we all live by a personal myth—and live curiously unaware of the myth's existence. In this sense, a biographer can discover more about his subject than that subject has ever known. We live our myths passionately and intensely, but most often blindly.

Our two cases, the English Conan Doyle and the American Rex Stout, offer a ready illustration of this thesis. Set down the circumstantial details of the two lives, and we find no particular resemblances between them; indeed there seems a great dissimilarity, save that both created popular detectives. Doyle, a British medical man about as incompetent as most doctors were in his time, had a penchant for adventure, travel, sport, and literature; he became popular as a writer for the penny weeklies. Stout, an ambitious and successful writer-businessman, made a new fortune by creating Nero Wolfe. Yet a closer and more analytical approach to the motivations of these two personages reveals striking resemblances. Both had an enormous drive to power; both sought to inject themselves into national and world affairs; both became heads of large organizations; and both received national honors for public services. Put simply, they had what we might call a "king complex" or a "ruler complex"—which, of course, each would have strongly denied. That was their myth. They were born leaders, or at least passionate would-be leaders. Rex Stout had more than a name which meant "king"; to judge by his choice of Nero Wolfe he had an emperor complex as well. Given the Latin name—his mother chose Rex because "he came out like a king"—he selected for his imaginary detective a wicked emperor out of Roman history. But he made his Nero benign, a pursuer of the common good; and Archie Goodwin, the detective's secretary and legman, as his name demon-

LEON EDEL, biographer of Henry James, is Citizens Professor of English at the University of Hawaii.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

strates, was a winner of the good.

The nomenclature is peculiar to Rex Stout's work; and it is interesting to learn that Conan Doyle chose the name for his detective in a less personal way. Holmes was named for Oliver Wendell Holmes, the American medical autocrat of the breakfast table, who was an uncommon sleuth in his laboratory and, like Doyle, combined medicine and literature. This name choosing, about which more might be said, is symptomatic of the deeper life-myths of both men. Our particular clue to the question I am posing lies in their "doubles." Doyle's Dr. Watson and Stout's Archie Goodwin help illuminate the mystery of the two lives out of which emerged the two strange and powerful detectives on both sides of the Atlantic. Sherlock Holmes admittedly is more powerful, more simple, less subtle, less elusive than the complex Nero Wolfe; he is also more publicly visible, bolder, more active physically. In reading Pearsall's brief life of Conan Doyle we see that Doyle himself was his own Dr. Watson: respectable, professional, rather on the dull side, even mediocre, but sound and hearty, commonsensical, and stoutly British, addicted to seeing the superficial and the external. Archie Goodwin, by the same token, is Rex Stout—aggressive, highly organized, highly competent, tough and humorous, yet full of respect for the superior brain machinery of his Nero boss, and, like Watson, always in touch with the commonplace. The two average minds of these sleuthing stories are more closely akin to the audience, which reads them and identifies with them; they are enabled to look at genius and ratiocinative power through down-to-earth minds.

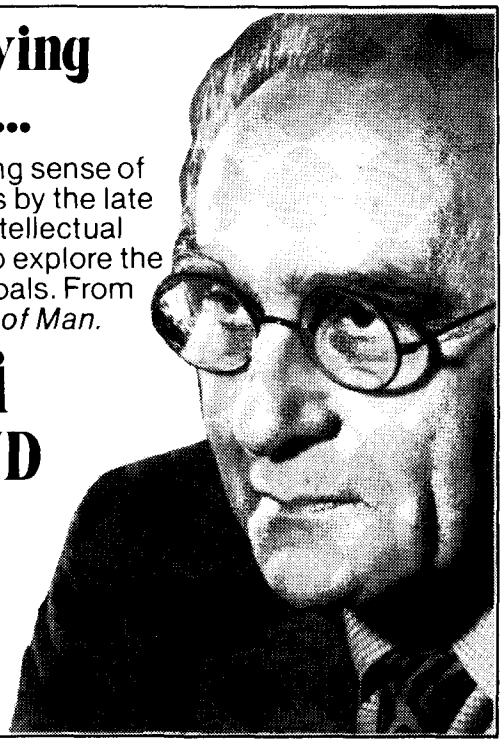
Put in another way, Sherlock Holmes is that part of Dr. Watson—or of Conan Doyle—which could not permit itself to be seen by the British public save in disguise. Doyle remained always eminently respectful. Sherlock Holmes, his hero, was his myth and his imagination, cutting loose from Victorian bondage, taking great flights into dens of iniquity and drugs where Dr. Watson or Conan Doyle would never have allowed himself to be seen, or playing a moody fiddle when depressed. Sherlock can tangle with the Moriarty mind almost as if he were the criminal himself. Nero Wolfe, in turn, was what Rex Stout could allow himself to be only in his

After we stopped believing love moved the planets...

Mankind found a new strategy for making sense of things: science. These refreshing essays by the late Jacob Bronowski take us through the intellectual revolution of early scientific discovery to explore the dimensions of science and its human goals. From the author of the acclaimed *The Ascent of Man.*

Jacob Bronowski
MAGIC, SCIENCE, AND CIVILIZATION

$6.95 at bookstores or direct from
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
Address for orders:
136 South Broadway, Irvington, New York 10533



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

imagination: a fat man with an imperial name—as *he* was a thin man with a kingly name. Small wonder that we find Stout to be an organizer of remarkable groups over which at some time or other he presided: the Society for Prevention of World War III, the United World Federalists, Freedom House, the Fight for Freedom Committee. He was also a prime artisan in his own guild, the Authors' League, and an embattled champion of modern copyright reform. He was imperial in his ability to direct, guide, and serve the institutions he helped to create. Doyle sought a similar kind of imperium, but with less success and more misguidedly in behalf of philistine causes. He did, however, fight for better divorce laws in England; he ran (unsuccessfully) for Parliament; he crusaded against the paintings of the Postimpressionists whose art, Dr. Watson-like, he could not comprehend; and finally, world famous, he became a leader of the Spiritualists. One point of striking resemblance between the two may be noted: Doyle was a hawk during the Boer War and was knighted for his propaganda on its behalf; Stout, in his youth a founder of the *New Masses,* was a Vietnam hawk.

This duality of the common self and the imaginative self—the old Jekyll-Hyde archetype—what is it but a form of the Freudian id-ego-superego? On the one hand creative and imaginative man is tied to the usual and the routine, the bondage of his society, and on the other he is put into print as the literal and prosaic Dr. Watson or Archie Goodwin—while the imaginative self achieves all freedoms beyond common reach and all the power that can prove superior to Scotland Yard and Manhattan police inspectors. The imagined self can take drugs, fiddle, grow orchids, or be outrageously eccentric. The philistines don't mind so long as Dr. Watson and sane Archie Goodwin good-humoredly accept the esoteric and idiosyncratic personalities of their superiors. What a charming way of cutting loose, of turning one's mythic imagination to splendid profit and renown, so that power is indeed gained in the end and the myth is made to come true! We might add, as I have already suggested, what a fascinating guideline for biographers! The struggle embodied in these dual lives, real and imaginary—is it not the struggle of all greatness in art, in politics, or on the field of battle? The secret elite self and the democratic public self, the wellsprings of the imagination, which might shock, are made acceptable and safely sanitized and channeled through an egalitarian frame. Mr. Pearsall shrewdly discerns this in his loosely written study, but John McAleer seems wholly innocent in his mausoleum book. "Holmes," writes Pearsall, "was almost always right. Doyle often *thought* he was right, when he was merely being a conventional middle-class Victorian, just, in fact, like Dr. Watson. There is a good deal of Doyle in Dr. Watson." It follows that there was also a good deal of Watson in the readers of Conan Doyle. And there is a good deal of Archie Goodwin in the readers of Rex Stout.

This, then, was the game of secret sharer that the detective-writers played—the influence they continue to exercise. They not only created the great sleuth, but they provided him with his explicator and apologist, as every American president is now provided with his press secretary. Since the public finds it difficult to identify with powerful minds or with genius, it is given a way of admiring that genius through a warmhearted form of vulgarization and familiarity—which is the way it mostly admires genius in actuality.

John McAleer's large book is a Boswellian work. He had the confidence of Rex Stout for some years before the writer died, and free access to his private papers. But he has written his biography in a rather commonplace way, without any thought as to what form it should take and what the story really is. He treats Stout as a titan of literature rather than a relaxed entertainer. Stout the organizer and committeeman can be put into a few succinct pages, but in this book the routine of the committees and organizations is given to us in lengthy and tedious detail. We wallow in minutiae. We are told how Stout trimmed his beard and cut his toenails; his favorite recipes; his life on his Connecticut estate, a veritable little empire created by a Rex.

The real story is not even noticed or grasped, even though every page of this heavily documented book offers implicit proof of the Stout who was the lively Archie and the Stout whose imagination soared into modern imperium and made him a familiar in imperial Washington. Stout battled for his causes publicly. His detective counterpart stays home,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

avoids human contact, yet struggles also with problems of crime and punishment, guilt, rivalry, competition, aggression—and reveals Stout's own benignly channeled constructive drive-to-power through good works. The hidden myth of Rex Stout was a semiconscious dream of himself as a big man, a man of weight and substance. And this, in effect, is what he achieved in his public life. There are many lessons for biographers in the Rex Stout that was and the Rex Stout who recorded his imagination of himself. By juxtaposing the life of Stout's British predecessor, from whom he derived his own sleuth, we can see better how hidden personal myths produce remarkable imaginative acts.

Sadly for Adlai

ADLAI STEVENSON AND THE WORLD: THE LIFE OF ADLAI E. STEVENSON. *By John Bartlow Martin. Doubleday. $15.*

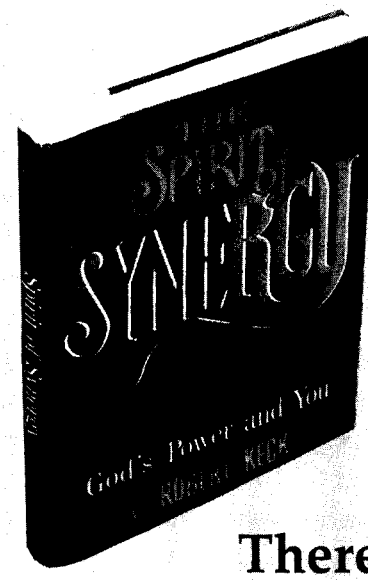
Reviewed by PAUL ROAZEN

The second volume of John Bartlow Martin's biography of Adlai Stevenson is a treat for all those who love to follow the intricacies of American national politics, and will be instructive even for those who were regular readers of the newspapers and periodicals of the day. It is never easy to learn the affairs of the party out of power, and during much of the time covered in this volume, 1952 to 1965, Adlai Stevenson was the unofficial leader of the Opposition. The American system does not make it easy, even for a figure with a seat in Congress, to effectively criticize a presidential administration. Even if we cannot wholly accept Martin's contention that John F. Kennedy was, in his policies, Stevenson's heir and executor, Stevenson did play a notable role in trying to challenge Dwight D. Eisenhower's invincible political appeal.

As a biographer, however, Martin leaves something to be desired. Stevenson was "a string-saver; he almost literally never threw anything away." His papers now constitute

---

PAUL ROAZEN is professor of social and political science at York University, Toronto, and author of *Erik H. Erikson: The Power and Limits of a Vision.*



There's never been a "How To" book like this before

THE SPIRIT OF SYNERGY:

GOD'S POWER AND YOU

In search of relief from crippling pain, a deeply committed Christian minister explores such diverse and esoteric areas as ESP, hypnosis, TM, biofeedback—and learns how to activate at will an incredible source of inner power that really heals. Now the Reverend Keck shares his discovery with you, making this far more than a spiritual adventure story with a happy ending. His life-changing book spells out techniques for synergizing mind/body/spirit to enhance human abilities and effect healing. Keck also presents step-by-step directions for Meditative Prayer, a method of achieving closer realization of God. Not for the timid or closed-minded, the Reverend Keck's story opens up new dimension for those ready to travel new paths. L. Robert Keck

$6.95

abingdon

at your local bookstore

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the largest collection of manuscripts any individual has donated to Princeton. One would have thought that under such circumstances a biographer had to aim at selectivity. Yet Martin tells us that in using Stevenson's papers he has usually left the material to "speak for itself," as if such an abandonment of critical standards would not have predictably bad results. A reader interested enough to finish a nine-hundred-page book covering a few years of Stevenson's life can be spared such details as the time of departure for an airplane flight or the type of aircraft involved. And does it matter what color suit and shirt Stevenson wore at a press conference? Only if Martin were writing about someone from a distant era, hard to re-create imaginatively, might such information serve a purpose.

Martin criticizes Stevenson for having cared too much about his speeches: "He seemed to think extemporaneous remarks unworthy of him." Therefore Stevenson wanted "to speak only formally and for the record." Martin contrasts Stevenson's speeches, which often read better than they sounded, with Kennedy's, which sounded better than they read. It has long been agreed that Stevenson was not a true intellectual—someone who read books and cared about ideas in themselves. But Stevenson did respect the life of the mind, which sets him apart from most other twentieth-century candidates for the presidency. If Martin, who was one of Stevenson's speech writers, is right in thinking that Stevenson fussed too much over his addresses, this book suffers from a similar defect. We are treated to long quotations from Stevenson's formal deliveries, as well as to lengthy extracts from remarks at press conferences. Stevenson was an avid letter writer, and here again Martin's inadequately restrained use of documentary material sinks his book as a biography.

Despite all this, Martin has succeeded, engrossingly, in evoking the memory of the frustrated efforts at political criticism during the Eisenhower years. Although Stevenson has gone down in history as a political Hamlet, he could at times be decisive, and he had the knack of attracting illustrious and knowledgeable advisers. Martin describes how, with aptly chosen expert advice, Stevenson quickly saw that John Foster Dulles's policy of "massive retaliation" did not square with the newly presented Air Force budget.

The account of the 1956 presidential campaign makes depressing reading. Martin blames Stevenson for not having made Eisenhower's health an issue—"it may have been one of his worst political mistakes"—without indicating how Stevenson should have gone about it. The public was hardly unaware of the president's health problems, and when, at the end of the campaign, Stevenson did raise the point it was rightly seen as an act of desperation. Stevenson was ambivalent about civil rights matters, and called for a policy of gradual desegregation. Identified with the southern whites, he opposed federal legislation to enforce the 1954 Supreme Court school decision, and it is no wonder black voters were less enthusiastic about him than they might have been.

In 1956, the country was thoroughly complacent and self-satisfied. Whether because of Stevenson's faults as a speechmaker, or the prematureness of such policy initiatives as a ban on H-bomb testing and the proposal of a volunteer army, it was a Republican year with an indestructibly popular president. The Hungarian revolt, and then the Suez crisis, only made Stevenson's final rout the more devastating. Eisenhower's plurality was second only to that of Franklin Roosevelt's landslide in 1936.

In 1960, Stevenson was unable to face political reality. He still yearned for the Democratic presidential nomination. Never realizing that he was offending Kennedy, he allowed his own candidacy to go forward, even though Kennedy felt entitled to his allegiance. Afterward Stevenson craved to be appointed secretary of state, although the ambassadorship to the United Nations was all Kennedy would come up with. For Stevenson the final years in New York City were frustrating, and more than one friend thought he had gone to seed at his last post. Stevenson hated to think in terms of power politics, and ineffectively tried to moderate Kennedy policy. He was disgusted at having been trapped into making false statements about the CIA's cover story on the Bay of Pigs invasion. The Cuban missile crisis was another disaster for Stevenson; although he was largely absent when decisions were made, a press story from within the administration made him look like an advocate of appeasement. Under Lyndon

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Johnson, never quite able to accept that he was neither president nor secretary of state, Stevenson counted for even less than during Kennedy's years.

Perhaps too much time has already passed to appreciate the context in which Stevenson lived, but reading this book now reminds one of how fundamentally conservative he was. Although he was far less suspicious of the Russians than others, still he regarded communism as "the great conspiracy of our century." Domestically Stevenson refrained from trying to break any of the power of existing Democratic party machine leaders. As late as 1954, Seymour Harris was still trying to convert Stevenson to Keynesian economics on budget balancing, and others in his entourage worked to help him "overcome his upbringing," by which they meant the Lake Forest influence on his thinking.

An early advocate of the domino theory in Southeast Asia, Stevenson disagreed with Pierre Mendès-France's 1953 suggestion that France give up in Indochina. In 1956 Stevenson declared, "There isn't any colonialism, it's all gone." In 1964 he was privately dubious about the Gulf of Tonkin incident, since he wondered what American ships were doing there in the first place. But by then Stevenson was outside the center of policy-making and too tired to think of any new undertakings. Despite reservations about Dean Rusk's policies, Stevenson supported Johnson's decision to send combat troops to South Vietnam and to start an air war over the north.

Martin's earlier volume, *Adlai Stevenson of Illinois*, covered Stevenson's first fifty-two years and was more successful in maintaining a balance between his private and public lives. In the second volume Stevenson's ex-wife, Ellen, keeps popping in and out. Despite (or consistent with) her feelings of persecution, she could not be persuaded to see a psychiatrist (except in Boston in 1942). In 1955 she gave a press interview in which she told why she thought Stevenson would not make a good president. No divorced candidate has yet been elected president, and in the 1950s women voters in particular were bothered by the failure of Stevenson's marriage. In the end, Ellen squandered her money and needed to be supported by her family. In 1966 her sons and her mother

Ideas That Challenge

JOHN MURRAY CUDDIHY
NO OFFENSE
Civil Religion and Protestant Taste

"This book is vintage Cuddihy; that is, it is brilliantly written, brilliantly argued and thoroughly provocative."—*Peter Berger*

"Cuddihy is a dynamic ... writer .... He has a finely honed sensitivity to the religious mind and a refreshingly blunt way with ticklish issues .... An original, stimulating contribution."
— *Kirkus Reviews*

"... the frequent brilliance of his analysis of and the sustained wit of his intellectual narrative will earn him ... gratitude from many readers ...."—*Richard John Neuhaus*

"The core of the book is devoted to the experiences of Reinhold Niebuhr, Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg and Jesuits Leonard Freeney and John Courtney Murray. Cuddihy's delivery is lucid and witty, and it is stimulating to watch him explode familiar myths."
—*Publishers Weekly*

288pp $11.95

A CROSSROAD BOOK
From your bookseller, or
THE SEABURY PRESS
815 Second Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10017

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

brought suit before a probate court to have her declared incompetent. A bank was appointed to conserve her estate. Another suit was filed by a social worker to have her submit to an examination at a psychiatric hospital; the court complied, but Ellen fled to another legal jurisdiction. Martin, having told the tale of Stevenson's tragic private life in his earlier book, here recounts how dependent Stevenson remained on support from women friends. Although he was closest to women, and had a number of what Martin calls "girl friends," as best one can make out, it sounds like a distant kind of love.

In office American patricians look graceful and urbane, but away from power Stevenson often seemed like a social butterfly. Despite problems with heart disease and high blood pressure, he ate and drank too much. Martin recounts all the "yachts, villas, idolatry, and food" that filled Stevenson's last self-destructive years. Yet until his death in July 1965 Stevenson showed an inner toughness even when he had the best reasons for self-pity. Characteristically, in his worst defeats he grumbled the least; and he succeeded in his capacity for drawing out the best in people in behalf of public service. Martin's book may be better political reportage than a subtle biographical study. But it does remind us that the words politics and politician are still capable of evoking admiration and respect.

Name Is the Game

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF ENGLISH CHRISTIAN NAMES. *By E. G. Withycombe. Oxford University Press. Paper, $4.95.*

FIRST NAMES FIRST. *By Leslie Alan Dunkling. Universe Books. $10.*

Reviewed by ERIC PARTRIDGE

If only someone would hit upon a suitable term for those names that are thrust upon us, which are not merely inherited, as are our surnames! *Christian names, font names* or *baptismal names, given names, forenames* or even *front names, first names,* and doubtless one or two others—all are eminently discardable.

But the matter isn't as simple as that. Let's take a look at the terms themselves, for the mere nomenclature sidelights the changing fashions in names, the changing attitudes in both the scholarly and the official worlds, and, fortunately, the minds and feelings of that much greater majority, the general public—often belittled by academe and ignored by officialdom.

Perhaps it is not irrevelant to interpose that, historically, the given name has preceded the surname, which after all literally means an additional name. But that is, essentially, another story. To those who possess the advantage of intellectual curiosity I recommend the entry "Personal Names" in N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (second edition, 1970, reprinted with corrections).

Until the Dunkling book appeared last year, the two most important books on first names were Charlotte M. Yonge's *History of Christian Names* (1884; reprinted, 1966) and E. G. Withycombe's *The Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names* (1945; third edition, 1977). Their authors, both scholars, have much to answer for. Whereas Miss Yonge established the usage, Miss Withycombe has done much to perpetuate it—at least up to 1945, when World War II ended. It's odd, by the way, that so many of the leading scholars in this field have been women: those two in Britain and, in the United States, notably (though not solely) Flora Loughead, whose *Given Names* was published in 1934. Odd, too, that neither *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* nor the indispensable *Webster's Biographical Dictionary* has seen fit to mention Miss Yonge's formidable pioneering work. The contribution made by Victorian women, however, has at last begun to be acknowledged and recognized—thanks in large part to the work done by Dr. Margaret Maison.

Since heaven knows when, there have been many protests against the predominance of the term *Christian* names, and not only by Jews, and it is now used less often than the collective body, almost the corpus, of alternatives. A direct offshoot of *Christian* names is

---

ERIC PARTRIDGE, the distinguished lexicographer, is the author of numerous books on the English language, among them *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English* and *A Dictionary of Catch Phrases.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

font, or *baptismal*, names. But all three terms place an unmerited crown upon one religion. To the non-philological, the link between the first and the other two is closer than at first appears. The *Christian* in "Christian name" may not mean the name of a Christian or even be used as an adjective. To me, as earlier to Ernest Weekley, the original phrase perhaps meant the *christened* or *christening* name. Slovenly pronunciation has accounted for more etymologies than has been supposed by the unlearned, and indeed the learned.

Nevertheless the expressions "font names" and "baptismal names" were fairly general almost up to the present era. Then early in this century "*given* names" commenced an increasingly widespread distribution, currency, and (I hope) popularity. It is logical; it is practical; it is simple. Next comes "*first* names"—a sensible term with much to recommend it. Neither biblical nor bureaucratic, it has not yet gained ascendancy over the terms so far mentioned. May it prevail! Probably only one influence, insidious and nefarious, can prevent its general adoption: officialdom, the slyly creeping intrusion and the crass obtrusion of bureaucracy. Yet I state the matter rather too strongly, for there are only two such terms of any note, "*fore*names" and "*front* names." Whereas the latter is utterly unnecessary, the former was probably a mere Anglicizing of the French *prénoms*, as in the late Albert Dauzat's *Dictionnaire étymologique des noms et prénoms de France*. (*Prénom* was apparently devised as the complement to *surnom;* it synonymizes *nom de famille*, in which, in Dauzat's title, *nom* is elliptical.) "*Personal* name" can denote either a given name or a surname or both together; yet in practice it should not be used to mean a given name, for that way confusion lies.

But let us consider Miss Withycombe's and Mr. Dunkling's books. Although both of them deal with given names, they are so different in matter and treatment that they present the conscientious reviewer with an almost insuperable problem. Many reviewers, critics, and scholars get around that problem by saying nothing about it. To some, the fact that Dunkling's *First Names First* is a new book on a topic of perennial interest and Miss Withycombe's *Oxford Dictionary of English Christian Names* is an old one (first published in 1945) establishes the far greater impor-

Woodrow Borah
I. Bernard Cohen
Paul K. Conkin
John Whitney Hall
Richard W. Leopold
Kenneth A. Lockridge
Lewis W. Spitz
Lawrence Stone
Stephan Thernstrom
C. Vann Woodward
Gordon Wright

The Future of History

edited by
Charles F. Delzell

Eleven distinguished historians assess the future of history and its relationship to the social sciences and other scholarly disciplines. ". . . papers are wide-ranging, critical, balanced, and packed with useful information and bibliography." – Robert Anchor, *History: Reviews of New Books.*

"Historians and scholars in related fields should find this fine collection of interest." – *Library Journal*

"informs outsiders on the state of a given field of history and at the same time tries to influence the behavior of that field's practitioners." – David A. Hollinger, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

". . . a high level of achievement." – *Choice*

$13.95

Vanderbilt University Press
Nashville • Tennessee • 37203

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tance of the former. To others, the fact that the latter forms a landmark in the history of the subject, and the former an agreeable interlude, a very readable book, seems—and is—the predominant criterion.

For the scholarly, as opposed to the intelligent general public, Miss Withycombe's book is by far the more important, more fundamental, and more dependable work. In the first place, it is not merely a dictionary. It contains an admirably succinct, well-proportioned, and well-considered history of the origins and development of given names, as well as a penetrating examination of their variety and nature. Its introduction has that clarity and brevity which come with a profound knowledge of the subject. Only the truly great scholars can write both briefly and authoritatively: witness, for example, Sir James Murray's introduction to *The Oxford English Dictionary* and Henry Bradley's *The Making of English*. It is much easier to write discursively than to write tautly.

In her preface, Miss Withycombe briefly mentions her predecessors in this field. Concerning them she is sometimes rather tart and "more than somewhat" acerb. She errs, I think, in ignoring Ernest Weekley's delightful *Jack and Jill*. Although it does not pretend to be for scholars (at least the more academic kind), it supplies much sound information. Rightly, she ignores my little *Name This Child*, which appeared ten years before her own book and was later abridged—and improved by being checked with her work.

Before she undertook this task, Miss Withycombe had had an excellent general training in scholarship. In short, she was already a fine scholar, and she damn well had to be! One doesn't get invited by the Oxford University Press to write, or even to edit, a book unless one has qualifications of a very high order. Not only did she justify its faith in her; she may almost be said to have conferred distinction upon that choice. The entries in the dictionary range from terse and brief to longer, historical, richly documented ones—for example, *James* and *John* and *Thomas*, *Henry* and *Richard*, *William* and *Edward*, *David* and *Andrew*, *Mary* and *Margaret*, *Ann* and *Elizabeth*, *Alice* and *Joan*, *Francis* and *Frances*. The list of sections is enlightening, prefaced by salutary reminders that "the main sources of English personal nomenclature" are Hebrew and Indo-European and that "with few exceptions, they were originally based on the theory of one name for each individual." Note the ordonnance:

Semitic Names
Indo-European Names
Greek Names
Celtic and Slavonic Names
Roman Names
Old English Names
Effects of the Norman Conquest
Growing Influence of the Church
Changes in the 12th and 13th Centuries
Rise of Surnames
Legal Aspect of Names
Nicknames
Use of Men's Names for Women
Names Referring to Circumstances of Birth
The Reformation
Puritan Names
Surnames as Christian Names
Use of Two or More Christian Names
Revival of Obsolete Names
Modern Eclecticism

In Mr. Dunkling's book, after a long list of acknowledgments and a mercifully short preface comes the introduction, which starts with the significance of first names and goes on to a chronological account, century by century. (Withycombe influence here, I'd say.) There is a section on the creation of feminine first names, and I earnestly hope the author has insured himself against grievous bodily harm inflicted by women's-libbers. This is followed by sections on the first names of white Americans, the first names of black Americans, first names in Canada, England and Wales, Scotland, and Australia (but not in New Zealand and South Africa). Mr. Dunkling also considers "Nonce Names"—unusual first names; "Assessing a Name"—evaluating one's own name and choosing a baby's name; and, finally, "Further Information"—first-name dictionaries, societies, and so on. As one is entitled to expect, Mr. Dunkling does give much information not in Miss Withycombe's book. His work covers a wider field, and exemplifies the higher journalism at its best.

Although *First Names First* amplifies Miss Withycombe's introduction, it certainly pays far less attention to individual names. Each of these books serves a different need, and the one complements the other but at different

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

levels. It would be misleading and oversimplifying to say that Withycombe is for the scholarly and Dunkling for the literate, intelligent general public. Members of the latter public might find—if they took the time, instead of being in such a ludicrous hurry to get nowhere—that the Withycombe is astonishingly readable, for the excellent reason that a writer with a good mind can make virtually anything readable. Conversely, if the scholarly public could abjure the feeling of superiority that spoils so much for them, they would enjoy the Dunkling book—the information, the instruction, and the pleasurable reading it painlessly provides.

For sheer scholarship, go to Withycombe; for genuine instruction at any other level, go to Dunkling.

A postscript, concerning the choice of a baby's name: Some parents cause their progeny to endorse the adage, "Always choose your parents wisely." At a grammar school I attended there was a Craddock and a Doyle, the former with the initials E. L., the latter with E. D. They were, in due course, embarrassed by being nicknamed *Elsie* and *Edie*. Later, at a university, an undergraduate surnamed *Drain* was given-named *William Charles*—hence *W. C. Drain*. Finally, I have been told that a fashionable wedding was ruined by gales of laughter at the juxtaposition of the bride's maiden surname, *Smellie*, and the groom's, *Rotten*. Disbelieve it at your peril!

The Enemy Within and Without

THE STORY OF CANCER. *By Armin C. Braun. Addison-Wesley. $9.50.*

Reviewed by HENRY MCDONALD

A common plot of science-fiction stories is that an alien force invades Earth and, by some mysterious process, takes over the minds and bodies of normal human beings. In these stories the suspense usually comes from not knowing who is an alien and who is

HENRY MCDONALD is a former information specialist at the National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health. He has contributed to the *New Republic* and the *Washington Post*.

OLIVANT PRESS *PO Box 1409* **Homestead, Fla. 33030 presents RESURRECTIONS by Gloria Oden** *Poetry* **ISBN 0-87956-071-1 paperback $4.00.** *"Gloria Oden's RESURRECTIONS is a remarkable book. It is a confessional work, but in a much deeper and richer sense than the kind of personal confessions that we are accustomed to hearing. Rather, it is a confession of the poet's relation to others — first of all her family and her intimate acquaintances. But it is, in the largest sense, a confession of love, and of the poet's relation to all people. Beautifully conceived and written, it is an important work and a triumph of human understanding."—JAY MARTIN* **Dr. Oden schooled at Howard and teaches at University of Maryland Baltimore Campus.** *WEID: The Sensibility Revue* **every 4th month $25—3 years/ $10—1 year/ $3.35—1 issue. Member CCLM, COSMEP. Vol 14 No. 1 features Gloria Oden:** *interview* **by Jay Saunders Redding** *letters* **from Elizabeth Bishop, Arna Bontemps, Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, Marianne Moore, Mark Van Doren.** ***PLUS THE NEW POETRY.***

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

normal—the climax revealing that even the hero, though normal in appearance, is really an alien. The horror this discovery arouses in us is associated with the discovery of *danger within normality.*

Most of us have a similar feeling when we hear the word "cancer." What makes the disease terrifying is not just that it is a "monster . . . more terrifying than any other scourge that has ever threatened the existence of the human race" (as one U.S. senator put it); it is that the monster lies hidden all around us. Carcinogens (cancer-inducing substances) are now recognized as a "normal" part of the environment, present in the air, water, food, even the tissues of our bodies. The pervasiveness of such substances, and the impossibility of escaping their reach, gives cancer—like the internal threat of alien invaders—the image of a masked and uncontrollable danger.

How real is this image? How well does our image of cancer correspond to what is known about the disease as a biological process? Scientifically, one might suppose that what is known about the disease should be capable of being explained clearly and what is unknown should be accepted as simply unknown. Unfortunately the situation is not quite so clear-cut. Much of what would constitute a satisfying definition of cancer falls neither into the category of the known nor of the unknown, but somewhere in between. As Rudolf Virchow, one of the founders of cellular pathology, put it, "No one, even if he were stretched on the rack, could say what a tumor cell really is." Many of the definitions of cancer have, accordingly, relied heavily on metaphors, and many of these bear a striking resemblance to the popular image of cancer as a masked, uncontrollable danger. It is an indication that even basic cancer research is culture-bound when one finds, in the most staid of scientific papers, references to the "lawless" and "insidiously deceptive" behavior of cancer cells as contrasted with the "well-ordered conduct of the society" of normal cells—when cancer cells are described as "criminals," "savages," "anarchists," "monsters," et cetera. As one might gather from such imagery, many of the models of malignant cell development are, in part, inverted models of normal cell development; but many of the models of normal cell development are conjectural as well. Hence cancer is an "image of an image" or, in the words of Francis Peyton Rous, founder of tumor virology, "the last stronghold of metaphysics in medicine."

Nonetheless cancer is also the second leading cause of death in the United States. Moreover, to those of us who have mulled over the notion of cancer as a "monster masquerading within normality," the nature of the disease remains an intriguing problem—one we would like to know as much about as we can. Armin Braun's *The Story of Cancer* satisfies this desire. The book is adapted from a series of lectures given by Braun to a "select group of gifted high school students" at the Rockefeller University, New York, where Braun is professor and head of the Laboratory of Plant Biology. The purpose of the lectures was "to provide not only an overview of the nature of cancer . . . but also to illustrate how insight is gained into a complex biological phenomenon such as cancer." The book succeeds in this latter task, though less by providing an overview of cancer than by presenting Braun's own fascinating and highly penetrating ideas on the subject.

The Story of Cancer (apart from its title) is not warmed-over popular science, outlining the "facts" about cancer and leaving an impression of certainty where none exists. Instead, like much basic research in the sciences, it is experimental, highly conceptual, and biased according to the author's own viewpoint (in this case, that of a developmental biologist who has spent a lifetime studying plant tumors, and applying his insights to the cancer problem generally). Those without a background in biology may have difficulty grasping the details of Braun's argument, but its main features should be clear, with some effort, to everyone. The effort is in any case worth it, for *The Story of Cancer* offers admittance to one of the most fascinating debates now being conducted in biological research. In so doing, it provides more insight into what cancer is all about, as a scientific problem, than all the popular literature on the subject.

Braun, like most researchers, does not try to define cancer. Rather, he points out what he (and many others) believes to be its most characteristic feature—cell autonomy, mean-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing the ability of tumor cells to grow in a manner largely free of the control mechanisms of their hosts. It should be added immediately, however, that cell autonomy is not a precise term and is related to a host of other features, some of which are the following:

Metastasis, or the ability of cancer cells, once having established themselves in a particular part of the body, to spread—usually via the circulatory system—to other parts and establish tumors there.

Invasiveness, or the tendency of cancer cells to lose "contact cell inhibition," a characteristic of normal cells, and thereby to invade surrounding tissue, progressively enlarging their area of control.

Irreversibility, or the widely accepted belief, challenged by Braun but confirmed empirically in the majority of cancers, that malignant cell transformation is a permanent, one-way process.

Transplantability, or the ability of malignant tumors, unlike normal cells, to be implanted and grow in animals of a completely different genetic makeup than those in which they originated—a property that attests dramatically to the relative autonomy of cancer cells.

And, of course, the well-known characteristic of *increased rate of cell division*, which allows tumors to grow rapidly, sometimes reaching an enormous size.

These features, however, are a good deal more complicated than the above definitions suggest. What is especially complicated about them is that none are unique to tumor cells. Normal liver cells can grow as fast as, and in most cases faster than, tumor cells; and certain kinds of normal cells show properties of metastasis and invasiveness. Even the characteristic of transplantability—perhaps the most important criterion of autonomy—is questionable; some kinds of tumors will not grow if implanted into an animal with intact regulatory mechanisms. Just how thin is the line separating normal and tumor cells is dramatically illustrated by studies showing that when normal cells of either plants or animals are grown in the laboratory for prolonged periods of time, some of these cells become tumorous—even though no known cancer-producing agent is present in the culture medium! Surely here is the ultimate carcinogen: time.

An extensive and detailed summary in one convenient volume . . .

THE FOUNDATION GRANTS INDEX, 1977

Lee Noe, General Editor
The Foundation Center

The best source of information on foundations which made grants of over $5,000, *The Foundation Grants Index, 1977* offers—

- a listing of over 14,000 grants, totalling $770,000,000
- a key-word index, index of recipients, and subject category index
- a thorough and easy way to save hours of research time

400 pages, $20.00

To order send check or money order to **Dept. JN.** Individuals must enclose payment. Institutions may request billing.

Published by **the Foundation Center**
Distributed by **Columbia University Press**
136 South Broadway
Irvington, New York 10533

MILTON and the ENGLISH REVOLUTION
by Christopher Hill

"Christopher Hill has brought the learning gathered in a lifetime's study of seventeenth-century England to a major reassessment of Milton as man, politician, poet, and, above all, religious thinker." —KEITH THOMAS, St. John's College, Oxford University

"Exhilarating . . . crammed with fresh information and challenging arguments." —QUENTIN SKINNER, *New York Review of Books*

$20.00

THE VIKING PRESS
625 Madison Avenue . New York, N.Y. 10022

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Such findings of the similarities between normal and tumor cells raise fundamental questions concerning the nature of the malignant process, questions Braun does not hesitate to ask. If, he reasons, there is really such a thing as "cancer"—that is, if the malignant process is a truly unified one and not, as many have maintained, merely a large number of different diseases—then there must exist some common cellular mechanism by which normal cells are transformed into malignant ones. What could be the nature of this mechanism?

One thing that is known with certainty is that since the properties of tumor cells (their "autonomous" features) are faithfully transmitted to their descendants over long periods of time, such a mechanism must involve permanent, heritable changes in the cells. But what is meant exactly by "heritable changes"? All the cells of the body, including cancer cells but excluding the germ cells, reproduce themselves asexually through mitosis: a process in which the parent cell divides itself into two daughter cells identical in genetic makeup to the parent cell. Any changes that are effected in the nature of the genetic information of the parent cell (information that is encoded onto the genes located in the nucleus of the cell) will be transmitted to its progeny. If the mechanism for malignant cell transformation involves heritable changes, then two broad alternatives for the form this mechanism might take present themselves. Either (1) some alteration of a mutational type has occurred in the genetic information of the cell—it has been partly lost, replaced, or rearranged—and/or (2) all of the essential genetic information is present in the tumor cell but something has gone wrong with the regulation of that information.

Such a distinction between changes in the integrity of the genetic information present in a tumor cell and changes in the expression of that information is not, as Braun notes, of merely academic interest. If changes of a mutational type involving the loss, replacement, or permanent rearrangement of the genetic information are involved in establishing the malignant state, then the heritable changes associated with malignancy are of a permanent and irreversible type. If, on the other hand, changes in the expression of the genetic information underlie the malignant state, then the heritable changes are potentially reversible, involving regulatory mechanisms such as those found in the cytoplasm (that part of the cell which surrounds the nucleus). In this case cancer could arise and be perpetuated in the presence of a complete complement of genes; it would result from the breakdown of regulatory mechanisms in otherwise normal cells and would be, in short, an expression of normal cell potentialities.

Braun argues in support of these latter notions. Although the irreversibility of the tumorous state has long been a dogma of cancer research (and a cornerstone of the influential mutation theory of cancer causation), Braun points to a number of studies in which the tumorous state has been reversed and in which the genetic information of cancer cells has been reprogrammed to make them behave normally. Further, he notes that regulatory systems controlling the expression of genetic information play important roles in many bodily functions. This fact can be seen clearly in one of the most basic of all biological processes, differentiation, in which the cells of the body diversify, starting from an undifferentiated state at conception, and take on specialized functions, developing into liver cells, muscle cells, brain cells, and so on. Since all the cells of the body include in their genetic material the entire set of instructions to make up the body (totipotentiality), some mechanism must exist by which these instructions are turned on and off. Braun notes that differentiation, like (he maintains) cancer, involves "persistent but potentially reversible heritable changes" in the cells. He goes on to state, "The tumor problem is basically a problem of anomalous differentiation . . . the fundamental cellular mechanisms underlying tumorigenesis are similar in principle to those involved in normal cellular differentiation."

To uphold this thesis, Braun cites one particularly remarkable study. The nucleus from a cancer cell of the common leopard frog (a Lucké adenocarcinoma) was implanted into an activated normal frog egg from which the normal nucleus had been removed. The result was that the cancer nucleus behaved like a normal one in that it directed development to proceed, in a perfectly normal way, to the tadpole stage; in the study, fully functional tadpoles, which contained all the specialized

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cell types, tissues, and organs present in normal tadpoles, were obtained. Although each of the tadpoles was derived from a cancer nucleus, there was no evidence of cancer in any of them!

How can these results be explained? According to Braun, they "illustrate very dramatically that the genetic information present in a cancer nucleus need not be irreversibly fixed, as was believed for so many years, but that it can, in fact, be reprogrammed" (that is, by factors in the cytoplasm). If the cancerous state in the Lucké cell had been brought about by changes of a mutational type—that is, by the alteration of the genetic information of the cell—it is difficult to imagine how such a mutated cell could have directed the normal development of the tadpole. Rather, it seems more likely that the cancerous state was brought about by a breakdown in the regulation of genetic information—a breakdown that was corrected when the nucleus was implanted into the cytoplasm of the normal cell.

These and other experiments provide support for Braun's view that cancer is an expression of normal cell potentialities—the result of a breakdown of regulatory mechanisms in otherwise normal cells. Thus it would seem that there may soon be a need for a more complete metaphor to characterize the malignant process than the traditional ones contrasting the "monstrous" and "lawless" behavior of cancer cells with the "well-ordered conduct of the society" of normal cells. This need has in fact already been elegantly met by three German researchers, R. Süss, V. Kinzel, and J. D. Scribner, who note that although the "lawless" behavior of the cancer cell appears to indicate it is "deaf to growth regulating signals," this is not necessarily so. "A society can be ill, without the necessity of its individual members being so. The individual does not necessarily have to be deaf, if regulatory signals are drowned out or are lacking altogether." The problem, in short, is not in the aberrant behavior of individuals, but in the social processes that regulate this behavior—processes which have become so pervasive that they take on every appearance of normality. The monster need not be within when it is everywhere around us.

LOOKING FOR A PUBLISHER?

You are invited to send for a free illustrated guidebook which explains how your book can be published, promoted and marketed. Whether your subject is fiction, non-fiction or poetry, scientific, scholarly, specialized, (even controversial) this handsome 52-page brochure will show you how to arrange for prompt publication.

Unpublished authors, especially, will find this booklet valuable and informative. **For your free copy, write to:**
VANTAGE PRESS, Inc. Dept. F-71
516 W. 34 St., New York, N.Y. 10001

NOVELS
by J. Inchardi
$10 each

Lines On The Death Of A Fisherman

Three Jews In A Tub

Dreamship

Yurros

A Paper Toy

Intercurse

Order by mail from
Sirius Books, Box 177
Freeport, Maine 04032

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Reader Replies

Fear and Trembling at Yale

Professor Gerald Graff's critical attempt in "Fear and Trembling at Yale" (Autumn 1977) raises several questions.

One concerns the accuracy of "New Criticism" as such a general definition that it includes prominent critics east of the Mississippi and a saving remnant from California. Most of those Graff cites spill accidentally from *The Well Wrought Urn*, easily escaping the confines of that miraculous vessel.

Another question arises from Graff's concern over the variety of statement in "modernism," which leads, in his view, to a confusing creation of new categories and new literary terminology, some of it borrowed from other disciplines. In spite of the appeal in the last paragraph of the article ("We should have to discard some of the central ideas of literary modernism. . . ."), there is no returning to a past of mythical, not critical, perfection. Reactionaries are not affirmatively creative, and a contemporary reader, or critic, should be excused from the quest for reductive simplicity, particularly when it proves barren and self-restricting.

The most serious question in Graff's work arises, however, from the basic technique of his argument. He uses the old debater's trick of setting up straw men as opponents; he pretends they are real, and then assumes that he demolishes them—thereby proving cleverness and expertise.

All that is proved in this case is shoddiness, neither critically alert nor even too promising as a technique of return to simpler, more satisfying critical origins. To choose a paragraph from Hartman's writing that is *not* representative, to cite a paragraph that is itself wittily parodistic of the persona of the "romantic" from Wilhelm Meister to Zarathustra, and to then cite critical praise of Hartman's other writing, bends a few too many categories and changes too many contexts to be successful as any improvement of criticism.

Robert D. Moynihan
Department of English
State University of New York
Oneonta, New York

Professor Graff replies: Mr. Moynihan's main point seems to be this: since I don't care for certain recent literary theories, I must therefore be a "reactionary" longing to return to a lost paradise of critical certitude, safe from the risks of the modern world. In other words, Mr. Moynihan resorts to the very strategy I described in my essay—the argument that if you don't go along with the New Literary Dispensation, you must be harboring "a neurotic fear of uncertainty that craves a final solution to all problems." It's interesting that the position Mr. Moynihan dismisses as a "straw man" turns out to be one he expresses.

Marboro Country

I should like to comment on one of the points made in the "Marboro Country" piece in the Life and Letters column of the Autumn 1977 issue of The American Scholar.

There it is maintained that, owing in part to the emergence and rise of the university presses, what used to be the "serious" publisher now leaves to the university presses the commitment to publish the serious book. "But the problem here," the writer goes on to say, "is that much good writing—works of belle-lettristic history, poetry, essays—falls between the two stools of commercial and scholarly publishing."

The implication seems to be that university presses are no more interested in belles lettres than the "general" houses and that the responsibility for the lamentable consequences to literature which all this entails is to be laid at the doorstep of publishers.

Some of us—I can speak only for Princeton University Press, of course—have made a special effort to encourage submission of precisely the kind of material whose loss to literature is now being lamented. We have two series—Princeton Essays in Literature and Princeton Essays on the Arts—specifically designed to accommodate studies in essay form. The announcement of the Arts series stated its purpose to be "to provide an outlet for provocative essays . . . in the criticism of the arts and in aesthetics . . . critical rather than purely factual in approach, turning free-ranging humanistic inquiry upon the visual arts, music, literature, aesthetics, drama, the cinema and other theatrical arts." So if the new Wilsons and Trillings are indeed hard pressed to find publishers, we should like to know it.

Margot Cutter
Fine Arts Editor
Princeton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW FROM COLUMBIA

SCIENCE AS A HUMAN ENDEAVOR

George F. Kneller

In this lucid synthesis of thinking on the logical structure and values of science Kneller shows that science is essentially a human endeavor, not an impersonal juggernaut. A holistic and humanistic view of the complex and often controversial practice of science. $13.95

TRADITIONAL CHINESE STORIES

THEMES AND VARIATIONS

Y. W. Ma and Joseph S. M. Lau, Editors

Spanning the Former Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 8) to the beginning of Chinese modernism in 1916, these sixty-one selected stories provide the most comprehensive anthology of Chinese short fiction available to the English reader. Tables listing chronological sequence and extensive explanatory notes accompany the distinguished translations. cloth, $30.00; paper, $9.45

PSYCHOANALYSIS, CREATIVITY, AND LITERATURE

A FRENCH-AMERICAN INQUIRY

Alan Roland, Editor

These authoritative essays trace the context and substance of the psychoanalytic movements in France and America. A wide-ranging and contemporary analysis, the book offers examples from both sides of the Atlantic of current approaches to psychoanalytic literary criticism and the dynamics of creativity. $20.00

FROM RITUAL TO RECORD

THE NATURE OF MODERN SPORTS

Allen Guttmann

Is the history of western society being written on the sports pages? Was the football boom of the sixties a result of the Vietnam war? Is the game of baseball a re-enactment of the ancient rites of spring? For answers, more questions, and a lively account of the evolution of modern sports, read this distinguished scholar's fascinating report. $12.95

To order send check or money order to **Dept. JN.** Individuals must enclose payment. Institutions may request billing.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS

Address for orders:
136 South Broadway, Irvington, New York 10533

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Read the latest from Emerson and Carlyle

The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson

Volume XIV

Edited by Susan Sutton Smith and Harrison Hayford

In these journals, written between 1854 and 1861, Emerson writes of his passionate concern with human liberty and slavery and prepares many of the lectures and articles that comprised *Society and Solitude*. This volume takes the philosopher of "the infinitude of the private man" to 1861 and the brink of war.

Center for Editions of American Authors.
Belknap
$37.50

Carlyle and Emerson

Their Long Debate

Kenneth Harris

Kenneth Harris has written the most thoughtful and illuminating treatment yet of two of the most arresting literary figures of the nineteenth century, their 38-year correspondence, and their concerns with the spiritual crisis of their time.

$12.50

Harvard University Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED